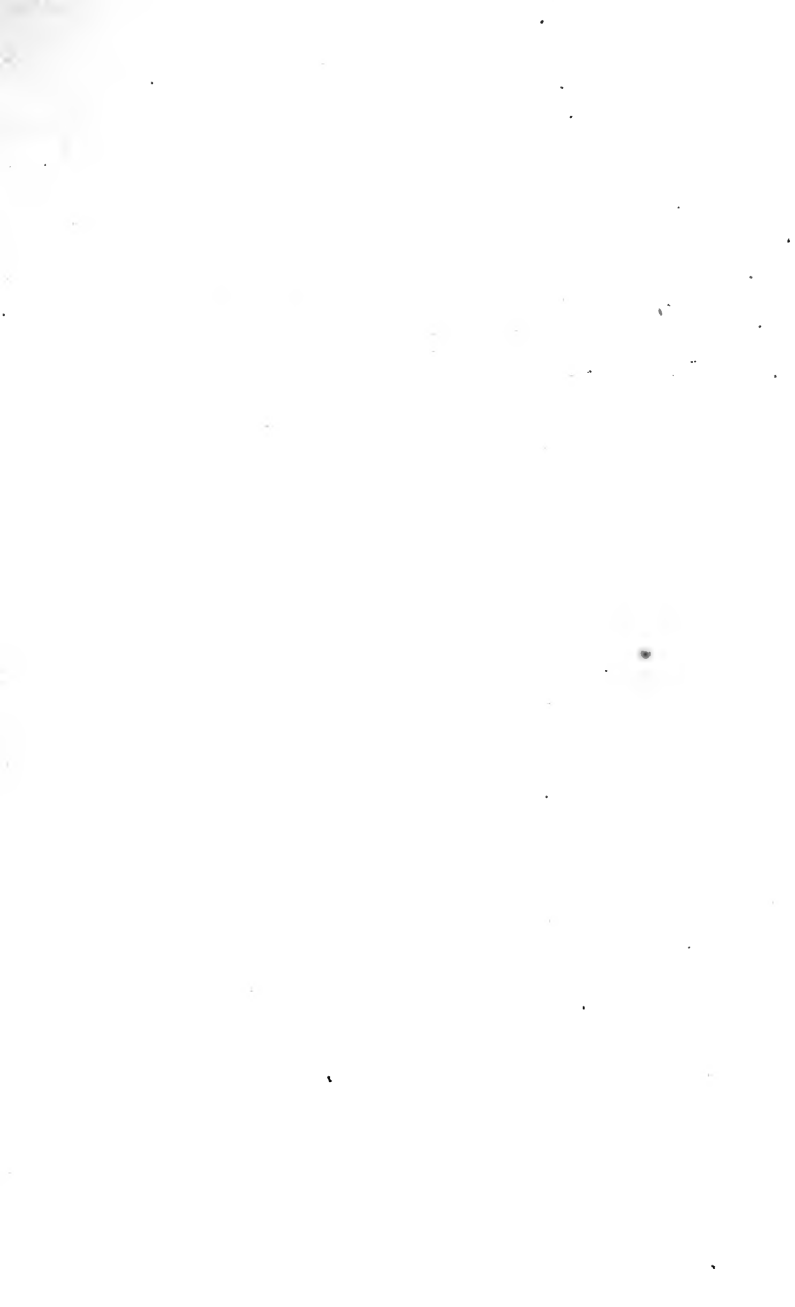


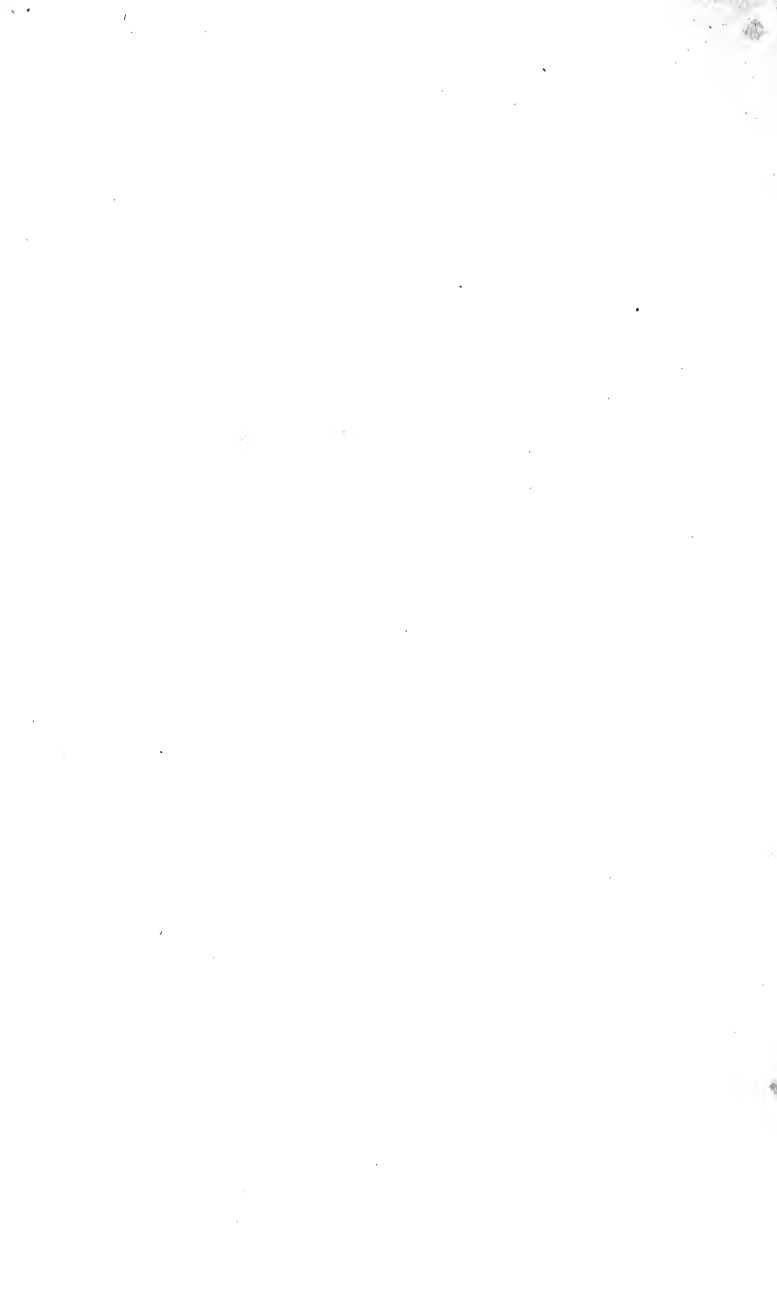
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JACK DOYLE'S DAUGHTER

BY

R. E. FRANCILLON

AUTHOR OF 'ROPES OF SAND' 'OLYMPIA' 'A DOG AND HIS SHADOW' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

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JACK DOYLE'S DAUGHTER

PART III—*continued*

MISS DOYLE

CHAPTER V

'BEYOND SEAS'

SIR CHARLES BASSETT felt no inclination to rise from his seat and clasp the hands of the two old friends whose presence formed, at last, a solid link between the Old Grey Mare and the New. It did not even occur to him that there might be something ignominious in eaves-dropping. Men in public places listen freely to conversations in which they have no interest. Surely if the talk interests them, there is reason for listening the more.

'Waiter ! Another white satin — stiff ironed,' said Ronaine, in the slang of the Grey

Mare, where every sort of drink had a name unknown to the profane. 'Have another yourself, Esdaile. If ye want to drink to the memory of the poor old archdeacon, in a way that'll be worthy of 'm——'

'It was curious, your attending Stella on her deathbed,' said Esdaile. 'Poor little girl! Why, I was in love with her myself once—for nearly a whole week, I believe. We all were, in turn, from the governor himself down to the call-boy. She was an odd sort of a girl; ten times a better actress off the stage than on. She used to want everybody to be at her feet, just for the fun of kicking him away.'

'That isn't what Jack Doyle would have called odd, anyhow. 'Tis what he used to say of all the women, and I've come to think he wasn't so far out after all.'

'You, doctor? Why, you used never to know the difference between a woman and an angel. Have you been bitten yourself, eh? But no wonder Jack thought so, if Stella was his experience of what an angel means. I don't believe she ever meant harm, though she'd swallow presents like a savage, and stick to a fellow till she couldn't get any more. I

like thorough-going people, you know. Stella was thorough-going. Jack Doyle was just the man for a thorough-going woman to marry—a big, bearded ruffian, who could drink a woman out of house and home and knock her down if she cried, and throw her away if she began to bore him. That's the sort of man a woman loses her head as well as her heart to——'

'And ye call a blackgyard like that "poor Jack Doyle"?''

'I didn't call him a blackguard, doctor. It may have been he that lost himself, head and heart, to her, and then—Heaven help him!—he'd be poor indeed. I suppose he left her, and I suppose he had good cause.'

'Good cause—to leave a woman to starve! For 'tis starvin' she was when I doctored her till she died. Ye make me want to knock somebody down, and yourself to begin on. Come, take your drink, and don't talk stuff, like a sensible man. Faith, 'tis queer that the first place I'd turn into, after being twice round the world, would be the Mare, and the first man I'd meet there would be you.'

'Not particularly queer, seeing what the

Mare used to be to us all, and that I've never left off feeding here, off and on. I've been feeling like the last man for years. There's Charley Bassett turned into a baronet among the Philistines, and Urquhart married and done for, and, for aught he lets any of us know, as rich as a Jew, and Jack Doyle drowned or hanged, and you, till to-night, trying to find out the size of the world. If ever a band of brothers was broken up and scattered abroad, it was ours.'

'But 'twas a band of fathers we were. And how's Zenobia—poor little thing?'

'You mean poor little Eve? I'm ashamed to say I've been but a bad sort of a father; I haven't been near the place for years. I really must go, some day. But the fact of it is that after a bit it began to strike me that our old friend the admiral wasn't quite such a fool as he seemed—in fact, a bit of a sponge. He began to absorb as soon as his better-half went the way of all flesh and left only the worse behind. I suppose it was because I was the only father left in London. Any way, it was wonderful the number of boots and shoes that baby wore out in the course of a year. And when the boots and shoes got to

be too much for my credulity, then she took to catching the measles, and the whooping-cough, and scarlet fever, and dyspepsia, and rheumatism, and heart-disease—about once a month——’

‘No, no, Esdaile ; that won’t do. A girl doesn’t catch the measles once a month ; and as to heart-disease——’

‘I always say, when I want a man to understand a joke, give me an Irishman. Any way, I got sick of the whole thing. I couldn’t go near the place without having to pay. I verily believe I kept the whole household in boots and shoes—the admiral and all his boys. What was your department, Ronaine ? For I suppose the household expenses were parcelled out among the five. On my honour, I could not afford to be a father any more. So I made a bargain. The child was being kindly treated enough, so I painted her portrait, or at least, put her into a picture, gave the price of it to the admiral for my discharge, and retired from business as a father. I suppose I ought to have invested it for her or bought an annuity, or something of that kind ; but I didn’t know much about business in those days, and—— But the truth of it is, our

friend the admiral did me, I'm very much afraid. Well, done or not done, it was a good bargain. Three hundred pounds down must have kept Miss Eve in boots for some little time.'

'And ye mane to tell me that, simple as ye sit here at the Mare, ye can paint a picture for three hundred pounds?'

'Hush! The back of this box may be between us and a dealer. I don't want all the world to know how little I got for the first picture I ever had hung on the line. Miss Eve did me some good after all. Since that picture I've not done badly, and only come to the Mare when I want a real steak—not the things they call steaks elsewhere. She had the most wonderful eyes as a child. I'd have taken her for model-in-ordinary, if it hadn't been for that son of a horse-leech, the admiral. As it is, I've tried to copy those eyes from my own first studies over and over again, and, except just that once, always failed. But about you—what sort of a father have you been?'

'Oh, first rate, my boy! Of course 'twas out of the question keepin' up my payments to the minute, hither and thither as I've been ;

but that was no matter, with you, and Bassett, and Urquhart—of course Jack Doyle didn't count—to keep things straight and square. But I never missed putting by five guineas a quarter, when I had them, to make up arrears; and I never drew on what I'd put by except when I was obliged, and then I had to borrow, ye know. But I owe it just the same; so it's all one. Why, the accumulation must have come up to not far from five hundred pounds. Better than your three hundred, Esdaile.'

'Five hundred! Well, I suppose it would be somewhere near that, if you've paid nothing. How time does fly—as I've heard somewhere. Only, don't let it get into the admiral's clutches, that's all.'

'Faith, after what ye say of the old gentleman, I don't think I will. I'll pay it into the girl's own hands with my very own. And after what ye say of her eyes, 'twill be a pleasant thing. I'll take it to Miss Zenobia myself, all in notes and gold. It's what I've been looking forward to ever since I've been rolling about the world. I always said I'd make her the greatest woman of her time.'

'Let me see. She must be a grown-up

young woman. She may be dead, she may be married, for anything we know. We are on the wrong side of forty, you and I. Isn't it rather too late to begin?'

'It's never too late to begin. The great thing's not to begin too soon. I'll be able to know now what's her line—music, painting, poetry, acting, dancing, marrying dukes, or whatever ye please. As soon as I've a big practice I'll do everything. And as far as five hundred pounds will go——'

'Good moss for a rolling stone. You've got five hundred pounds for that baby, in notes and gold?'

'An' that I have—anyhow, an' that I will have, when I've put back what I've had to borrow at odd times.'

'And how much may the fund amount to now?'

'Well it happens just at the minute to be a trifle low—not more than sixpence or sevenpence, maybe; and maybe I'll have to borrow that, too, for the extra white satin. But it's all there, all the same.'

'All there? All where?'

'If ye wasn't yourself, I'd knock ye down. All where indeed? Why in the honour of

Ulick Ronaine; an' the Bank of England couldn't say more. Waiter! Another white satin—and whiter than the last, if ye please.'

Poor Marion Eve Psyche Zenobia Jane! If she had ever known anything—if she could know anything now—nothing could have promised much fairer for a foundling than to become the adopted child of four—I may omit Jack Doyle—of four generously eccentric young men, who had sworn new brotherhood over a helpless baby. One ideal father had been made up of those four: Charley Bassett, the kindly and accomplished English gentleman; Ronaine, with his impulsive zeal; Esdaile, with his shrewd common-sense; Urquhart, with his severe views of economy and training—English, Irish, Scotch; lawyer, physician, gentleman, and man of the world. Jack Doyle had been the only blot upon the shield held over her, the one weak link in the chain. And now the gentleman had forgotten her, the man of the world had washed his hands of her for comfort's sake, the lawyer had grown afraid of her, and the physician had learned to identify her with that To-morrow which he chased as hotly and earnestly as a

kitten hunts its tail—never caught, though always its own. All had broken down.

But Sir Charles Bassett, listening, had no thought for her who should have been to him Marion, just as she was Eve to Esdaile, and Zenobia to Ronaine. For that matter he knew her to be dead, and that there was no reason for Ronaine to bother himself about turning the fairy gold of to-morrow into the hard cash of to-day. Neither poet, painter, singer, actress, duchess, would she ever be now; as a dead foundling she had fulfilled her whole fate, and there was an end of her. It was for other reasons that his senses had been sharpened to hear every word of a conversation that, though in a public room, was not, after the satin began to do its work, spoken quite in the low tone in which Englishmen mostly discuss matters where money is concerned.

Was it likely, in truth, that John Doyle and Rayner Bassett should be one and the same? Rough guesswork was not proof. But that was not the question—the question stood, to his mind, and was bound to stand, was it likely, was there a reasonable hope, that John Doyle and Rayner Bassett were not one and the same? All he had heard and conjectured

of Uncle Rayner was identical with what he knew of John Doyle. Uncle Rayner was known to have been living with a woman as his wife ; and now it had been asserted that he had been married under the name of John Doyle, and that the marriage could be proved, fact, place, date, and all. There was absolutely no evidence of the death of Uncle Rayner, while John Doyle, after a long disappearance, was certainly alive. Uncle Rayner was just the man to marry a country actress (if he cared to marry) under a false name, and afterwards to sink to the degradation of John Doyle. If there were no extraordinary coincidence in all this, Uncle Rayner was alive. Strangers to the circumstances had suspected Doyle of some deep-laid design in coming back from India—still with an evil reputation—and raking up old stories about Sir Charles. If he were Uncle Rayner, there could be no possible doubt as to what those designs must be. Uncle Rayner, learning of his inheritance, would not be the man to leave his own unclaimed.

Sir Charles wished in his heart that he had not been moved by the sentimentality of an idiot to drop into the Grey Mare. There

was really nothing odd in his finding Esdaile there, if the latter had never quite fallen away from the old place, and as to Ronaine, the world is very small, and stranger chance meetings between old acquaintances happen in London fifty times a day—to most men twenty times a year. Nor was it particularly remarkable that it should have been Ronaine who attended the death-bed of a woman who called herself both Mrs. Bassett and Mrs. Doyle. It was the combination of all these things that touched Sir Charles as with the finger of destiny, and made him feel, rather than argue, that the most obvious inference was really the most true.

There were no newspapers to cover one's face with at the Grey Mare, so he bent his head over a pocket-book and affected to make memoranda while his two old friends passed his box on their way out. They did not even look towards him, so that he was able to notice how much or how little they had changed. Esdaile had grown stout and sleek, and shaved his chin and lips and wore whiskers, as if he were a solicitor instead of a painter. The world had obviously gone well with him—he had reached comfort and competence

if the fame prophesied for the ex-scene-painter was not as yet great enough to have travelled all over Lincolnshire. But then there had always been something quiet and un-Bohemian about Richard Esdaile, even in the ultra-Bohemian days. Ronaine, on the contrary, looked as if he had been travelling down, as well as round, the world. He was as lean, as gaunt, and as ugly as of old, and rather more shabby. Indeed—a thing that rarely happens to a man—he was uglier middle-aged than he had been when young. Wrinkles and red blotches had not improved him; his eyes had lost their redeeming brightness, and the old genial smile had become defiant and reckless, without however turning sour. He did not look as if he had five hundred shillings; but, at the same time, as if Zenobia Burden would have been a rich girl, if only the heart of Ulick Ronaine had been a mine of common gold.

His moral assurance of the identity of his Uncle Rayner with his old friend the arch-deacon seemed to numb him a little, as he walked, not to his hotel, but to Ralph's lodgings. Without something more than moral assurance, his reason told him there was no cause

for meeting possible ruin, and the overturning of all that had become his whole life, half way. Only a few years ago he would have been prepared, after a fashion, for the surrender of Cautleigh Hall. But now, when he had just learned to feel at last absolutely safe for himself and his son, the surrender would come as a crushing blow. Why, what was he in London for but to indulge to the full in his sense of security? Better than to give up Cautleigh now would it have been to have remained plain Charley Bassett with four hundred a year to throw away in the purlieus of the Old Grey Mare. And what justice would there be in the transfer of wealth and rank from him and his son, and from such as he hoped his son's sons would be, to a drunkard, a profligate, and a forger? True, he had been in possession of Cautleigh for the full legal time. But he was lawyer enough to know that absence beyond seas when a right accrues rendered possession short of forty years of no avail. Jack Doyle—Rayner Bassett, had been certainly in India when the Rector of Cautleigh died. Just the one chance in a thousand had happened that he had never dreamed of foreseeing.

It was past midnight when Ralph came home, bringing Lawrence with him, and, to his surprise, found his father waiting in his rooms. And something about his father made him exclaim, by way of greeting :

‘You in town! Is anything wrong at home?’

‘No; I came up suddenly on business, and I hadn’t time to let you know.’

‘I wish I’d known—I shouldn’t have been out of the way. This is my friend Lawrence you’ve heard me speak of.’

‘I am always glad to meet my son’s friends,’ said Sir Charles, with an air of vexation at not finding Ralph alone that he could not quite conceal. But Lawrence was happily thick-skinned, and honestly thought that the manners of a Sir Charles Bassett could not possibly be wrong. Ralph set about producing things to drink in a matter-of-course way that did not please the father, who used to do the same thing for his friends in a very much more matter-of-course way.

‘I am very glad to meet Sir Charles Bassett, indeed,’ said Lawrence, making himself at home with a cigar and a drink in a

manner that irritated Sir Charles for no reasonable reason at all. 'By the way, I suppose your son has told you of our meeting with that money-lending fellow, who had the impudence to claim to be a friend of yours? I knew of him in India, you know.' The choice of the topic was not the height of tact, but it would have been otherwise harmless, except to Lawrence's own reputation for the good form that he admired.

'Yes,' said Sir Charles, more sharply than his son remembered to have heard him speak any one word.

'Oh,' said Ralph, 'you must know that Lawrence dreams of Doyle. He saw Doyle's daughter once—and he's gone.'

'His daughter?' asked Sir Charles, this time in a tone of real interest which surprised Ralph still more.

'Your son knows,' said Lawrence, 'just as well as I do, that she's the prettiest girl in London. It's a fact—we do dream of Miss Phoebe Doyle. But, talking of dreams, I must be gone. Good-night, Bassett—good-night, Sir Charles, and au revoir.'

Jack Doyle's daughter—Rayner Bassett's daughter! If that were so, then good-bye to

land and life for good and all. Unless indeed——

But the thought was too vague to take form even in the mind whence it sprang. It only prompted Sir Charles to say :

‘Do you know this man Doyle? Where he lives, I mean?’

‘Lawrence knows,’ said Ralph, bringing an extra cloud from his cigar, and so speaking as to imply, ‘Lawrence knows—not I.’ ‘It’s——’

‘I may have occasion to see him after all. So she’s the prettiest girl in London—eh?’

‘Lawrence thinks so,’ said Ralph as before. Then they talked of many things, but neither of Jack Doyle, nor of Jack Doyle’s daughter, nor of Cautleigh Holms. Sir Charles lingered over the talk, for he was in no hurry for his own company and that of his own dreams.

CHAPTER VI

‘LOVE WILL FIND OUT THE WAY’

THAT night at the theatre. had been an event. But gradually, she knew not how, the manner and all the surroundings of her life changed and changed for Phœbe until it seemed to her that she had always been Phœbe Doyle. Of course she thought she knew perfectly well that she had once been Phœbe Burden, who lived with the Nelsons; but knowing a thing is one thing, and feeling it is another. When stay-at-home people have been a week out of England, their familiar home seems to belong not merely to another country, but to another world, so far away does it feel; and the foreign ways are all the more real for being so new and so strange.

Nothing in the old life had ever been quite real, seeing that it had been nothing so much as a back garden of dreamland. But

the play, so long as she attended to it, had been real, and the new life was so unlike the old as to force itself upon all the sense of reality that nature had given her; to wake up all her senses from their sleepy stagnation. Harland Terrace is a clean and pleasant street in a western district, which people who wish to flatter its residents address as 'Hyde Park' by courtesy, and with a little more show of reason than in the case of yet more distant regions. The rents were high, the tenants rich, and the houses large enough to hold the whole Nelson family twice over. There were rooms, and to spare, to give Phœbe three entirely to herself—her bedroom, of course, and a day-room, and another little room for odds and ends of things and uses. Her father, also, set up a sacred den, and there were the drawing-room, and dining-room, and morning-room left for them to meet in and for company who never came, and enough bedrooms to make a full house instead of an empty one. The stairs were so low and so broad as to seem to Phœbe, used to something like a ladder, scarcely to be stairs at all, and there was a small greenhouse at the back waiting for flowers. The

furniture had once appeared to be on a scale of no less magnificence and elegance, though few women would have called it either the one or the other. It was comfortable in detail, but rather bare and tasteless in general effect; as might be expected from the arrangements of an old Indian who had been used to the life of a bachelor and was in a hurry to get the business of furnishing over and done. There had been very little planning of rooms, and none of that lingering over this and that idea at decorators' and upholsterers', which cheats one into the half-belief that their works are things to be personally proud of as well as to be personally liable for. Phœbe's taste, whenever it found expression, was rather wild; her father's was decidedly stiff and hard; so the result was by no means successful to the orthodox eye.

However, she was used to it all now—to the house, to its furniture, and to the art of living therein, without having as yet been screwed down into the groove of its undeniable monotony. There was still a sort of dignified excitement about the aristocratic process of coming down to a late and leisurely

breakfast without having first to take in the milk, and sometimes to pay the milkman, and often to run out in bad weather to buy a red herring or a quarter of pound of tea, while the boys were squabbling over their mixed-up boots, and the fire refused to make the water boil. She had closed her eyes to the old ways with the art of the ostrich; she was glad enough to open them wide to the new. Her father also took to the earliest home comforts of the day very kindly, and rather lingered over a breakfast-table at the head of which a woman sat for the first time since he had been a boy. He was not talkative, and read the 'Times,' more or less, throughout the meal, but he was always gravely good-tempered, and always pleased and ready to listen and respond whenever Phœbe happened to think of something to say. There was nothing that could be called conversation, but the barrier between their thoughts was not thicker than is usual between a father and a grown-up daughter, who must naturally be farther apart than even a husband and wife can contrive to be. After breakfast her father retired to his own den, dividing the bulk of the day between unknown and solitary

pursuits, accompanied by much tobacco, at home, and irregular wanderings out of doors, so that Phœbe was left mistress of herself till dinner-time.

But she had been used to that in her old home and understood the art of doing nothing without weariness perfectly well. It was of nobody like Phœbe Doyle that were written those lines of half-wisdom—

Ah, wretched and too solitary he
That loves not his own company.

In spite of the nature of her bringing up, she did not make friends of her servants—not because she was too proud, but because she could not help being more than half afraid of them, especially of the highly respectable person who had been chosen to act as Phœbe's particular maid, to attend to the linen and the sewing, and, in general, to relieve the mistress of the house of all the troubles of house-keeping. There was no man-servant, and for that matter there was no need of one except for unnecessary show, nor had Phœbe's father yet set up a carriage. But there was no lack of service, as became the household of an old Indian, and the maids were looked after, more

or less, by Mrs. Hassock as Phœbe's *maitresse du palais*. She was one of those people who are apparently born to be called 'Mrs.' whether married or single, and are never, even when in service, roughly called by an unprefaced surname. In all visible ways Mrs. Hassock was a treasure. She moved with a staid and noiseless dignity that befitted an earl's housekeeper, never dropped an H, never chattered, and seemed to have no friends—followers were out of the question, for she made no pretensions to be young, and was as hard-featured as honesty. Moreover, if she soon learned how to rule the house, it was with an invisible sceptre. No rare order or suggestion of Phœbe's was ever disregarded, and Mrs. Hassock never gave what were her own orders as her own. Phœbe felt really afraid of this duenna-like personage, for whom she found several prototypes from her acquaintance with the Spain of fiction; and so she thought it her duty to dislike her a little. But never did duenna—if such she were—ever give less cause for disliking. All she seemed to live for was to make the wheels of Sixteen Harland Terrace, run smoothly.

Phœbe did not sing ; did not paint ; nor play the piano ; nor write sonnets nor novels ; nor ride ; nor make calls nor receive them ; nor employ her fingers with what women, for some jocular reason, call work ; nor perform one of the duties belonging to the station of life into which she had been called. But, to repeat it, she found it infinitely easier to get through her days than one could have believed. How many hours were there to dispose of after all ? It was fully eleven o'clock before the day began, and the dinner-hour was six and bed-time eleven, which, making all due deductions for meals and for the times that even the busiest people have to spend in their dressing-rooms, left but some nine hours, at most, out of the four-and-twenty to be idle in. One must be a cormorant for work to be incapable of doing nothing for eight or nine hours a day. There were Kensington Gardens, with their real trees and their real people, and the streets with their shops, and it never appeared to occur to her father that there was the least peril or impropriety in her going out alone. Sometimes he went out with her himself, but not often, and she very much preferred the

solitary walks in which she could think her own thoughts, such as they were, and put herself into the places of the chance people she saw, and make up histories of them. In the evening, after dinner, when her father always stayed at home, even his companionship, after an uncompanied day, was relief and change enough to make some three hours, with the help of tea-making and with the nearing prospect of bed-time, pass not unpleasantly. But in the day-time it sometimes rained or was misty, or going out was, for some other reason, impossible. And presently, as time went on, Phœbe discovered an amusement at home that proved so fascinating as to make her less and less disposed for the shop windows and for the silent company of the world out of doors. Considering that she was a grown-up young woman, it was childish enough. She had found among her father's exceedingly few books—for through all his changes of life a few books had still clung to him, and a few more had found their way about in the unaccountable way that books have of gathering in the most unlikely corners—an odd volume of plays. It was a collection of acting editions of some dozen stray

tragedies and comedies of various authors, cut to the same size and shape by an unskilful bookbinder, and bearing on the first page of the first play, in faded ink and highly-flourished letters, the name of 'Stella Fitzjames.' With the experience of 'Olga' upon her, she first read the plays, and then acted them aloud to an imaginary audience in her own room, taking all the parts, but especially those belonging to the leading lady. It was better than novel-reading. And the nearer she knew the plays by heart, the more fascinating it grew. It allowed her to throw herself into the thoughts and feelings of other people and to make a stage of her life, better even than the old back garden, which had dropped out of so much as her dreams.

Of her dead mother she never found a sign nor heard a word. She would have asked questions had she dared ; but instinct told her that this was sacred, or at least forbidden, ground. No doubt her mother's death had been a tragedy so deep as to make memory torture and words profane—a wound beyond the power of time to heal. Silence upon such a subject increased her awe for the strong man who had suffered so

terribly for such a cause. Yet it seemed strange that an only child should be left ignorant by a widowed father of so much as her mother's name. And yet, after all, it did not seem strange. Stranger things happen in real plays every day. So she went on with her play-acting, and found in it a very real world, fully as large as any back garden. No doubt the last scene of the last act would come all in good time.

One morning, after breakfast, her father went into his own room as usual and had lighted his first cheroot, when, against all the routine of the household, Mrs. Hassock tapped at the door and entered with hardly a formal waiting for leave. She was always as dignified and stately as a tall and portly person and a black dress could make her, but this morning she looked as proudly important as if she were the bearer of bad news.

'Well, Mrs. Hassock, what is it?' asked Doyle rather impatiently, for he had of late been drifting into grooves that a trifle disturbs.

'I have come, sir,' said she in a voice as solemn as a funeral, 'to say a word about Miss Doyle.'

‘About Phœbe—Miss Doyle? What on earth should you want to say about Miss Doyle? Do you mean to say you’re not satisfied? Then——’

‘There it is, sir. I’m not satisfied. I’ve not been satisfied for a good while. No, sir, I don’t mean about the place. I’m not satisfied about Miss Doyle.’

‘Good Heavens! Do you mean to say anything’s the matter with her? That she’s not well? Why, she looks better than when—when we came here, a hundred times.’

‘Oh, sir, it’s like enough she’d look the better for being back from India. She was bound to look yellow enough then. But looks are as deceitful as males. Of course she’d look her very best. Young ladies in that state of mind mostly do.’

‘Oh, if you don’t mean she’s ill—— But what do you mean? I don’t know anything about states of mind. You’ve got something to say—nonsense, I suppose. Have it out at once. What have you got to say about Miss Doyle?’

‘There it is, sir. Of course, it isn’t to be expected that a gentleman, with other things to think of, would take notice of such things.

But things mayn't be noticed, and yet they mayn't be nonsense, all the same. I know what I'm going to say might be called free. But if a woman isn't free to speak her mind, then all I can say is, I don't know what freedom means. It's been on my mind a long time.'

'For Heaven's sake throw it off then, and as quickly as you can! What has been on your mind?

'Why, how it's not good, nor natural, nor proper, for a young lady that's grown up beyond a governess—not that I think much of governesses; they mostly know more than's good for them, and their sense is too uncommon for me—but for a young lady that's outgrown her back-board to be mewed and cooped up like an abbess in a harem. She's bound to mope after company of her own sex, let alone the other——'

'Yes, let alone the other, Mrs. Hassock, if you please,' said Doyle with real impatience. 'I knew you were going to show me where you keep some mare's nest or other when you began. I don't keep company, as you knew very well when you came into my house. Miss Doyle has never been used to company

since she was born. I lived by myself in India, as many people have to do out there.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' asked Mrs. Hassock, 'but was Miss Doyle born in India? She speaks uncommonly little of the country, to be sure, and I've known the ways of Indian ladies, and what they want, and what they've been accustomed to, and Miss Doyle's like for all the world as if she'd never seen the outside of London. As I was saying to Ellen only on Saturday, or, as I ought to say, as Ellen was saying to me when we were sorting out the wardrobe, she hasn't an Indian shawl.'

Mrs. Hassock was far too grave and dignified to be suspected of impertinence or curiosity. Her master could only feel annoyed that even so innocent an imposture as his should not prove wholly plain-sailing. Phœbe was ostensibly from India. What could signify to a mortal soul the unsolvable problem of where she had really been born?

'I never listen to gossip,' said he shortly. 'I suppose my daughter's shawls are entirely her own affair. Is that all?'

But Mrs. Hassock was obviously not to be dismissed until she had spoken out the whole of her mind. To give her credit, it was an indulgence to which she was by no means prone, and she had evidently in the present case set herself the task less as a pleasure than as a duty.

‘No, sir,’ said she. ‘It’s not good for a young lady to be shut up in a house all alone with nobody to speak to and nothing to do. Of course, there’s yourself, sir; but I remember I didn’t ‘call my own father much company in particular, when I was a young girl. Lord! you may love your father or your mother as much as you like, but there’s thousands of little things, and all as harmless as doves, that a girl wants to say to somebody—and a father won’t do. If she can’t say them out in a wholesome way, mark my words, sir, they’ll strike in like pimples; and what’s to happen then? You’ll want a doctor, or a sensible woman, to say. She’ll shut herself up with books, and that’s bad for the brains. I’ve seen girls muddled out with reading, till they’d no more brains left than a cheese. And if they get sick of that rubbish, and aren’t looked after, then they go walking

out like a school without a mistress, and only one girl. And then, if they're not as plain as a pikestaff——'

Her increasingly solemn manner was beginning to have some sort of effect upon him. After all, he felt, what did he know about girls? Had he really made a mistake in arranging her life so as to keep her away from every possible influence of harm?

'Well?' he asked, in a severe tone that had no effect upon Mrs. Hassock whatever. 'I suppose you mean well; so I will let you see, once for all, that you are wrong. I do not interfere with her in any way. There are the theatres—she might go to one every night if she pleased——'

'And, begging your pardon, sir, it's clear, as she doesn't, that Miss Doyle don't please. And little wonder there, say I—to be cooped up in a box, and not so free as when she's at home, with nobody to look at her clothes. That night she did go, she didn't come back as if she'd enjoyed herself more than a herring on a hill, as one may say. Only if she don't enjoy so much as that, she'll find out something, or else something'll find out her. There's other folk than young ladies that have

eyes in their heads, and tongues in their teeth, to take their walks abroad.'

'Do you wish to stay in this place, Mrs. Hassock?' said Doyle in a very different tone.

'Certainly, sir,' said she. 'I'm satisfied now I've spoke my mind, and washed my hands.'

'Then, remember this, that you are not engaged to watch over Miss Doyle. You have forgotten your place so far as to dare to hint to me that my daughter is not to be trusted alone.'

'There it is, sir. There's nobody fit to be trusted alone—not one. Not till she's fifty if she's a day, and not too often then. It's just being left alone that makes girls go wild. Only, of course, if I'm not to speak, it's nothing to me. So when any more shabby young men that don't make their hairdressers' fortunes come moonraking up and down the terrace, and giving a shilling—which is part of their shabbiness—to housemaids and such-like to put letters into young ladies' own hands, I'm to see that their bidding's done. Very well, sir, I will; and if the letter's to ask her to meet him in Kensington Gardens,

I'll go and pick enough gooseberries for a pie.'

'A letter !' exclaimed he. But he instantly added, with an indifference that must have disappointed Mrs. Hassock sadly, 'What an absurd ado about nothing ! I suppose you have the letter if Ellen has the shilling ; what would have been a handsome fee for carrying a letter up a flight of stairs ? Give it to Miss Doyle at once, and don't dare to delay letters any more.'

Mrs. Hassock, with doubled dignity, left the room. But it does not follow that any airs of indifference on the part of a mere man, however well assumed, deceived her longer than it took her to go upstairs and say :

'A letter for you, miss, if you please.'

The very first letter Phœbe had ever received.

It was a commonplace-looking letter enough, except that the exceptional commonness of its envelope made it look like a small shopkeeper's bill rather than one of those communications that are delivered to young ladies with a piquant touch of mystery.

Phœbe had sometimes opened bills, but

she knew perfectly well that this was no bill as soon as it touched her fingers. Bills do not smell of musk or patchouli, and for the same reason she knew that it did not come from any of the Nelson family. She took it with a 'Thank you, Mrs. Hassock,' but not without a flush of excited curiosity that made the old lady look between the lines, and read, by the light of experience, a great deal that was not there. As soon as she was alone, Phœbe opened her first letter and read:

'Angele of my Leif, and Queen of my Sol! Wat is this Mistere meen? I loose you of the garden, I feind you to the Drama. If you love me, it is all right; but if you love me not, it is Revenge! I call you to remind, I have killed a man. The nearest time, I shall kill three. If you meat me not rount the corner of Keswick Place, at three hours Friday afternoon, I shall kill first him, and then you, and then me. But I am just and brave; I will once know if we deserve. You are mein. And I am

ADRIANSKI.'

And she had been forgetting her hero's

very existence, even in her dreams ; except, indeed, when something unpleasantly reminded her of her first theatre. But this was a page out of a real play ! Suicide and murder—it was terrible ; but Phœbe felt, at last, that life was not going to be a wholly empty thing. She placed the letter in her bosom, according to rule, and, with beating heart, considered what stage law called upon her to do. She was still considering when the lunch-bell rang, and uncomfortably reminded her that her father had not gone out that day. She would have to meet him as if nothing had happened, but with a secret on her heart. It was a golden situation ; one to be proud of figuring in for ever. And yet she wished that lunch had not been ready quite so soon.

CHAPTER VII

NO BETTER THAN A WOMAN.

‘IF this is some trick of the admiral’s,’ was Doyle’s second thought about the letter, ‘to try to get more money than he bargained for out of a weak girl, I must show him that his fool half is bigger than his knave half after all.’ But second thoughts are notoriously those which men use to blind themselves to yet more unpleasant ones, and Mrs. Hassock’s hints had troubled him in a way he was ashamed to own. He did not really think that the letter had come from the admiral. He had certainly seen nothing about Phoebe that looked either sly or flighty; but then, when he came to think of it, what had he seen about her at all? As much as she had seen about him. He had never had reason to believe in girls. Why should he believe in her without any reason at all? He felt like a member of the Charity Organisation Society

who has thrown half-a-crown to a chance beggar.

Like a sensible man, however, he knocked his worry about a strange girl on the head as hard as he could, and ate his lunch before he spoke to her. Moreover, he gave her every chance of eating hers, and, not being a Mrs. Hassock, did not notice that she looked flushed, and lunched entirely on a tumbler of water. But he lost no time over the meal. It was still Phœbe who was afraid of him, and not he of Phœbe.

‘You had a letter to-day,’ said he. ‘Who was it from?’

Then Phœbe, taken by surprise, suddenly turned as hot as fire, and blushed so crimson that even he could see.

‘I ask you,’ said he, with an answering frown, ‘because, if it is from the ad—— any of the Nelsons, I have a right to know if there has been any breach of our bargain. You know what it was—he sold his right to see you, or speak or write to you, or have any communication with you of any kind. And I distinctly understood that you had no other friends. Who was it from?’

He did not mean in the least to speak

severely, or to put on any tyrant's airs ; but he was as anxious and as uncomfortable as if Phœbe had really been his daughter, and he was doubly troubled by an anxiety that he himself could not understand—he did not feel merely like a man whose only trouble is a chivalrous responsibility for a girl who has to look to him as her only friend and champion. It was as if he were personally and in his own rights aggrieved. So he seemed—so Phœbe thought—as if he knew more than he pretended about her letter, and was making tyrannical use of parental authority. She had read of the sacred rights of correspondence, and had never known a man who was above a stratagem—except Phil. Except him, she had never known a gentleman in her life ; and she had never known a lady at all.

For everything she had been prepared but for the plain question, ‘You have a letter. Who is it from?’ He waited for her answer, but none came. It seemed to him as if she were hanging her head in a sort of obstinate shame.

‘Phœbe,’ said he, with weight in every word, ‘when I claimed you as my daughter, I made a resolve—to trust you, through and

through. It was an experiment—but worth trying. People don't hide things unless they're wrong.' And he was not more wrong than everybody who talks of people as if all the world were one man, and that man, he. 'You dare not tell me who has written you a letter that, if there is no harm, I may see, and if there is harm, I ought to see?' Mrs. Hassock was right—her master did not know much about girls.

But what magic is there in the word 'Dare'?

She looked up, and straight. 'It is from Count Stanislas Adrianski,' said she.

'And who the dev—— Who on earth is Count Stanislas Adrianski?' exclaimed Doyle. But he was half relieved, for he had begun to fear that she might be going to tell him a lie, just as if she had been brought up all her life among women.

All Phoebe's plans and dreams and visions felt confounded and overthrown. She was afraid of her father, and had done that terrible thing—she had dragged out into daylight the name of a secret dream. But how was the chosen of a hero, who knew how to love to the point of murder and suicide, to fail in

courage for his sake when she was dared? That would have been the very shame of shames. Well—the deed was done now; and she was bound, for honour's sake, to love and be faithful to Stanislas, even if she had not hitherto been unable to let him drop out of her mind. If he had been but a barber's block it was all the same. She would otherwise be no better than an anonymous Second Lady.

'Who on earth is Count Stanislas Adrianski?' asked her father again.

'He is a patriot—a nobleman—a Pole,' began Phœbe, doing her best with a part which she had been allowed no time to study, and trying to put fitting warmth into her words.

'Patriot—nobleman—Pole! and shabby,' he went on, quoting Mrs. Hassock's description, 'and with long hair. I know—I know. Well?'

'Yes,' said Phœbe, 'he wears his hair long. And patriots cannot afford fine clothes.'

It was almost the first time he had heard what might pass for a reflection from her. To say anything of the sort was so unlike Phœbe that he could not help glancing at her sharply, as if to see what her eyes rather than

her lips were saying. But her eyes, as usual, were mysteriously dumb. 'Yes,' he said, in almost a growl, 'when they can afford fine clothes there's no more need for patriotism—whatever that may be. You're right there. And how long have you known this patriot, nobleman, and Pole?'

'I have known him long enough,' said Phoebe, finding the right words at last, 'to know that he is a true hero; greater than if he was as rich—as rich—as we.' She sighed. Riches are a curse, according to the heroic creed.

'There is one thing I will not stand—I will have no quotations from that Haunted Grange. The author should have been hanged in the first chapter—and I don't know that he'd have come to the worst end for him, after all. I don't want to know that you've known him long enough. I want to know how many weeks—days—hours.'

'For a long time,' said Phoebe. 'He lived next door to us—at home.'

'A friend of the ad—— of the Nelsons? I see. To communicate with you by deputy was not in the letter of the bargain. It is not a bad notion—for a knave.'

Then Phœbe fired up with real warmth—this was not merely poetical injustice, but real. ‘He was no friend of fa—— of my friends; I don’t suppose he had ever spoken them a word. He was my friend.’

‘And where used you to meet him, then?’

‘I used to be sometimes in our garden—and——’

‘And your—friends knew nothing of your acquaintance with this nobleman?’

‘No.’

‘Is this the first letter he has written to you?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you have never seen him since you have been with me?’

‘No,’ she said, crumbling up the remains of her bread, and in a nervous manner that made her seem sullen. Doyle could not bring himself to demand to see the letter—indeed, he hardly knew if the just rights of a father extended so far, and if they did, it could only be in the case of a real father, and not of a sham one. ‘That is,’ she added, suddenly and quickly, ‘once——’

‘You have seen him, then? Since you have been with me? Where?’

‘At the play—at “Olga.”’

‘You should not have said “No,” even at first, Phœbe. Did he know you were going there?’

‘He no more thought to see me than I thought to see him! He did not even speak to me—not even when you wounded his pride by throwing him money for opening the cab-door. He was in the orchestra, playing one of the violins—at least, a sort of violin. I suppose he has to earn his bread while he is waiting——’

‘Count, Pole, patriot, fiddler! Yes; I have some hazy remembrance of giving a penny to a fellow with a patched head, at the theatre doors. So that was Count Stanislas Adrianski. Now I want you to understand me, Phœbe. I am older than you, and I don’t need to see your letter to know what it means when a foreign count, who has to fiddle for a living, writes secret letters to a girl who, as you say, appears to be a rich one. I don’t need magic to guess that there is a postscript asking for a small loan—Halloa!’

His exclamation was brought out by a sudden change—volcanic is the only word for it—that came over Phœbe. Something like

a real woman seemed to take fire in her at last, and to show itself in eyes that for once looked living flame. Instead of flushing she turned pale.

‘There then!’ she exclaimed. ‘Read his letter, and see what he says to me!’

“Angle”—“Anclé”—“Angel.” What’s this?’ He read the letter through without another word. ‘Infernal rant! He deserves a horse-whip—and I expect it wouldn’t be a new feeling. Well, after this precious stuff, there’s one good thing left. You know what to think of your Polish count now. A hero, indeed, to threaten and bully a girl. He’s like a thing out of a French novel. Of course, you won’t answer him Phœbe. Leave him to me.’

‘Oh, father! you don’t understand! I must answer him. I am ashamed of myself——’

‘I’m glad of that—for I must say you ought to be, of such a friend. But——’

‘I am ashamed of myself—for having been false, and forgetful, and—and—— But that’s over now. He is not like other men. No, I can’t, because things are changed with me, give up a man because he happens to be

friendless, and unfortunate, and poor. That would be shame! Papa——'

'Well?'

'I have promised to be the wife of Stanislas Adrianski.'

'The wife of the fiddler who wrote that letter? You?'

But he was not amazed. A knife seemed to go to his heart; but only because, as he bitterly told himself, nothing was more natural; he ought to have foreseen something of the sort long ago. Girls will be girls—credulous, stubborn, sly. Mrs. Hassock had been right after all. It was as if a last illusion had gone. But he had made himself responsible for her life; and worthy or unworthy, from this pitfall she must be saved. For he was shrewd enough to have formed a very clear idea as to what sort of creature this Adrianski would prove to be.

'Phœbe,' he said very gravely and sorrowfully, but much less unkindly, 'I suppose you would tell me that if a father has nothing to do with the growth of his daughter, he must take all he finds. And as you don't see for yourself what sort of a fellow this is, I suppose I might as well tell what he is to the winds.'

But all this is nonsense, all the same. I don't want to see the fellow. I'll write him a line from myself, to say that he is welcome to your hand if he likes to take you without a penny. And then—exit Count Adrianski.'

She looked round for a moment at her new home and the comforts that had become a second life to her, and then back, with a shudder, at the sordid and slipshod years that she had left behind her. She was not one of those heroines of high life who do not know what poverty and struggle really mean, and so choose them eagerly, and without even the sense of sacrifice. Nor did the companionship of Stanislas in her poverty appear the all-sufficient consolation that she knew it ought to be. But it was too late for such thoughts now. Here were the heroine, the lover, the tyrant father. To withdraw, or even to palter with the obvious demands of dramatic honour, would be degradation and loss of self-respect for ever. Stanislas must be a hero; she must love him; she must treat her father like her enemy. In effect, though, she wished in her heart of hearts that Stanislas had never reappeared, though she knew, in the same way, that her father was

no enemy, and though she was more than half frightened, she was called upon to rebel.

‘He would know how to answer that!’ said she. ‘And—and—I love him—passionately, of course; and of course I would follow him, poor as he is, to the end of the world.’

Doyle should have known that girls who have the ghost of a notion of what love and passion mean do not find their names so ready to their tongues, or talk about following men to the end of the world. He might have read the wholeness of her heart in the very turn of the phrase. But he was much too nearly cut to the quick of his own heart to judge fairly. So here was the end of the girl whom he meant to remain as he thought he had found her—not much of a companion, and with not many thoughts or ideas, but honest, modest, and pure. He thought he began to guess what was meant by the unfathomable depths of her eyes, by her silence and want of interest in outer things. She was only too real a woman after all. Whether he liked her the worse for that, in his heart, who can tell? But that he was bitterly disappointed by the discovery he honestly believed. ‘She is in love with the black-

guard,' he thought with an inward groan. 'And she's capable of going off with him, as penniless as she came to me, if I say another word. And "set a thousand guards upon her, love will find out the way." Stella all over again! Know one, know all!'

They were still sitting opposite one another in silence at the table, when the servant brought in a card and gave it to Doyle. And he read thereon, 'Sir Charles Bassett, Bart., Cautleigh Hall.'

Doyle went into the drawing-room too full of his scene with Phœbe to wonder what so unlooked-for and so unwelcome a visit might mean. But the baronet, unaffected by so stiff and cold a reception on the part of his old friend, came forward with a hearty smile and held out his hand warmly.

'So you are Jack Doyle!' said he. 'I heard of my son's meeting you by chance; and I was down in my own country—but here I am! Why, we all thought you dead, and here you are what was never foretold of you—a Nabob; but no less the old Jack Doyle. Why didn't you drop me a line? Or have you turned proud? You used not to be the

man to forget an old friend. If I hadn't the misfortune to be a widower I'd have brought Lady Bassett to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Doyle. But——'

'There is no Mrs. Doyle,' said he shortly. Oddly enough, now that the two had met, they were recovering the airs of the Charley Bassett and the Jack Doyle of old. And yet neither in the one case nor in the other did the note ring wholly true.

'I'm sorry, old fellow. Of Miss Doyle, then. Before we say anything more, will you dine with me at the Club at seven? I'll get Urquhart to meet us, and my son. I wish I could ask Miss Doyle; but we might manage to include her in something else another time.'

Doyle had already prejudiced himself against his old friend, and there was something in Bassett's manner which prevented even old associations from turning prejudice into liking. Was he not the man who, with all his airs of bonhomie, and in spite of all his brag and his wealth, had left Phœbe to grow up into what she had grown?

'Thank you,' he said, 'I never dine from home. India and age have given me whims, and the right to indulge them——'

‘And to be a bigger bear than ever,’ said Sir Charles with a smile. But it was the most outward of smiles. Why should plain Jack Doyle behave in this more than bearish fashion to an old friend who had never done him wrong? But if he were Rayner Bassett, then the motive of his behaviour was only too clear. One does not dine with a man whom one is about to rob of his last penny; at least, unless he were less of a gentleman than the very worst of the Bassetts could be suspected of trying to be. ‘Then, when I’m next in town, the mountain must come to Mahomet—I must dine with you. Is Miss Doyle at home? And would she mind my having one glimpse of Jack Doyle’s daughter before I take my leave.’

‘I’m afraid she has a bad headache,’ said Doyle with an inconsistent, almost repentant desire to treat Phœbe gently now that she was not present to enrage him with her newly-discovered perversities.

This time Sir Charles meant to smile, but it was with his lips only, while his eyes frowned. ‘Ah, this trying weather, I suppose,’ said he. ‘When do you think of leaving town? And where shall you go?’

‘Probably nowhere,’ said Doyle. ‘Why should anyone leave home who is not obliged?’

‘Why not? Besides, London is never home. If Miss Doyle has headaches she has all the more need to go away now and then. I have it,’ he said, by way of a new test. ‘I am going to have a rather full house at Christmas. Suppose you and Miss Doyle come down for as long as you like and can, and make it fuller still. An English country house would be a new experience to our young Indian, I suppose?’

‘Impossible,’ said Doyle; ‘quite impossible. I am a business man——’

‘And so am I. But I’m not too busy to remember my friends. Well, if you can’t, you can’t, I suppose, unless you can manage to change your mind. But, if you can’t, surely Miss Doyle can? Pray, old fellow, just for the sake of old times, don’t make me feel ashamed. Not to have either of you in my house, after a lifetime! You ought to have come to me at once. But better late than never. Come now. Why, Doyle, if I had visited India—I or my son—while you had been living there, I should have stayed with you, or made him

stay there, half the time. Would you have allowed us to go elsewhere?'

Doyle would have refused the offer to make one of a strange company in a country house had Sir Charles Bassett been really the Charley of old; but a sudden thought flashed into his mind.

He had been more impressed by Mrs. Hassock's words of wisdom than he knew. What wonder was it that a girl, ill brought up, or ill grown up, with neither work nor pleasure to occupy her, should take to poison for want of other food? She had owned—as he remembered now—to having let Stanislas pass out of her life until she had seen him by chance and received his letter. Of course; it was just like every woman—out of sight out of mind. He felt that he was understanding her better and better every hour. A few weeks in Lincolnshire, amid wholly new scenes, would soon blot out every remembrance of her native London, of the Nelsons, and of Stanislas Adrianski. She would run no risk of meeting with a soul who knew her, and the county ladies were less likely to harm her morals, it seemed, than solitude. Open attack is better than a

secret mine. To accept this invitation could do no harm; to reject it might be a golden opportunity for a change of life thrown away. Of course it would be easy to him, if not a downright relief, to part from a girl who had hitherto been so little of a companion. And besides, thought he, Bassett would have a right to her company if he pleased, and if he knew—according to the bond.

‘You are right, Bassett,’ he said more cordially, ‘and it is kind and friendly of you towards my girl. Things are dull for her here, I’m very much afraid. I can’t come myself, but as to her—will you let me think it over, and write in a day or two? It is something of a step, for a girl——’

‘Out of her shell? Yes, and the sooner she makes it the better. There’ll be other ladies, and we’ll show her that India isn’t the best country in the world, after all. This is Monday—let me hear by Wednesday,’ said he, ‘and let it be yes. Nothing else will do. Or, stay; Mrs. Urquhart is coming down on Thursday. Let her be chaperon. . . . I wonder what this move means,’ thought he as he took his leave. ‘It’s what I expected—

but not quite in the same way. But whether better or worse, I'm hanged if I know. But one thing is certain—Ralph's son unborn shall be Sir Charles Bassett of Cautleigh Hall, without having so much as a shadow to fear.'

'Phœbe,' said Doyle, remembering that Friday was the day fixed by Stanislas for their rendezvous, 'you will, on Thursday, start on a visit, without me, to Sir Charles Bassett, at Cautleigh Hall, in Lincolnshire. I don't know how long you may stay. It will be good and pleasant for you. You will easily get all you want in two days—and you had better take Mrs. Hassock, I suppose. Sir Charles suggested your going with another lady, but I would rather have things my way.'

So Phœbe thought ; and she knew as well as he why she was being sent away. It made her all the more bound to loyalty, and to meet her plighted lover in spite of all the powers on earth or elsewhere.

And so that evening they sat as wide apart as two people can be. He was the domestic tyrant, she the girl who has to be

crushed out of a maze of folly with a strong hand.

‘He is a—father!’ thought Jack Doyle’s daughter.

‘She is no better than a—woman,’ sighed Jack Doyle.

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH OR GLORY

AND Stanilas! What in the name of heroic love was Phœbe to do now?

She was to start on Thursday, and well she knew why, and well she read in her father's voice and face a decree from which there was no appeal. Friday would come, and Stanislas would wait for her at the corner, and she would not come, and then—what would happen then! But it was not so much the chances of what the newspapers call double murder and suicide that troubled her, as the mean and cowardly part she felt herself to be playing. She did not ask herself why she had not more openly defied her father, because she had learned that he was not one to be openly defied. But surely there was some effective exit from the complication open to a girl whom paternal tyranny was tearing from her lover. 'Oh, if I had never seen him!' thought she, and it

was the most honest wish she had ever formed—so honest that it made her ashamed of its honest treason to the man whom dramatic duty and the whole fitness of things bade her love with all her heart and soul, if only because her love was thwarted and opposed. And Cautleigh Hall! She wished it had been a convent or a castle, but 'hall' sounded well enough, and if it only had a moat the situation would be complete indeed. Sir Charles Bassett would, of course, turn out to be some grim old feudal baron, with power to put refractory guests under lock and key. But then it was for her so to act that these privileges should not be thrown away upon a tame and spiritless creature who did nothing to deserve them.

One thing she could do, and that was to be as sullen as the days were just then. She could leave to Mrs. Hassock all the preparations for her journey, and affect no more interest in them than if they in no wise concerned her. The line of conduct proved much more difficult than she expected, because she really felt anything but sullen, while the prospect of her first journey into unknown regions excited her and

interested her a great deal. But she had made up her mind that 'Phœbe Doyle, a sullen young woman,' was the description of her part, and she acted up to it as well as she was able, snubbing Mrs. Hassock at every turn, whenever there arose a question of clothes or packing, with an 'I don't know!' or an 'It's all the same to me!' which must have proved intensely aggravating to a lady's maid whose place was less worth keeping. Mrs. Hassock, however, unconscious of playing the part of duenna in a complicated drama, took Phœbe at her word, and did everything her own way. As for her father, he might have been made of granite for any effect that her new style of behaviour seemed to have upon him. He even spoke of her visit into Lincolnshire cheerfully, and as if she would find it a pleasant change. 'Is he glad to be rid of me?' she asked herself, and forgot to answer that, if he were, he had plenty of cause.

By the time that Tuesday was half through, and only one whole day was left her wherein to make up her mind how she should communicate with Stanislas, and what she should say—for it is no light thing to write one's first real letter to a great man and

a hero, especially when no strong impulse finds the words—she had come to the conclusion that she must do something if she was ever to hold her head up before her looking-glass again. How would an elopement look, especially with forgiveness at the end? But then, forgiveness did not seem suggested by such a father as hers. In short, she felt herself in a maze of helpless despair, such as few but children ever enter, when a letter was brought her a second time—and this time she knew the hand; and her father could not have seen this, for he had been out since breakfast time.

‘All is change!’ it began. ‘As you love me, meet me, not at Friday, but to-day, to that corner, at Four.—A. I await, even now.’

‘Mrs. Hassock,’ exclaimed Phœbe—it was not Mrs. Hassock who had brought her this letter—‘Mrs. Hassock, I can’t go in my old waterproof to a Hall! It isn’t fit to be seen. And there are all sorts of weather in the country, not a bit like——’

‘India? No, miss. As for the waterproof, I’d have mentioned it myself, only you

didn't seem to mind, so it wasn't for me to say.'

'But I do mind. Of course I mind. It's not too late now. I can go and get one now, and be back by dinner-time. I shall be sure to find one that will fit me, somewhere.'

'Why, she isn't the same girl,' thought Mrs. Hassock, 'that she was this minute ago. She didn't seem to care if her hat was crushed to ribbons; and now she must have a new cloak, or the world 'll come to an end. . . . And the rest of the packing, miss? Is there anything else particular you want done?'

'Oh, put in everything, anyhow,' said Phœbe, with impolitic inconsistency, and darted off into her bedroom.

Phœbe got herself ready for walking at amazing speed, and was gone before Mrs. Hassock had time to put this and that together; and, when she did, nothing came. It was a good wholesome sign of returning moral health, when a girl took a sensible interest in sensible things. It was certainly rather foggy weather for a young lady to run her own errands, but in foggy weather she, who had once been Phœbe Burden, was at

home, and had often run out, without even a bonnet, on worse days, as in the case of the candles. And the mist was a godsend, for if she chanced to meet her father on the way to the appointed corner, and if he saw her, she knew very well that she would feel ready to sink into the ground. Had the letter come soon enough in the day to give her thinking time, she was by no means sure that she would have found the resolution to obey its summons. Happily for her heroism, it had come just when she wanted a directing impulse, and had not compelled her to pause. Now, at last, she could feel she was doing the right thing—escaping by stratagem from a father and a duenna, to a secret meeting with the hero who loved her. Even her fear was a delight in its way.

And there, sure enough, was Stanislas waiting for her under the gas-lamp at the corner. The mist was not thick enough to hide the long dark locks, the lean lank figure, and the sallow complexion of an *Adrianski*. He knew her too, for he came quickly forward and took her gloved hand in both his own, which, being gloveless, looked raw and felt cold. She noticed that he was better dressed than of old,

was cleaner shaved, and that he had, to his great improvement, given up the black strip of plaister which he had gained in her battle. Why did not her heart beat with joy at feeling her hand in his, at last, once more? Perhaps it was the fog—perhaps because his hands were really too damp and cold to make their grasp a pleasure. Nor did he, somehow, look quite so handsome as in the back garden far away. Still, it was with herself that Phœbe felt disappointed, not with him.

‘Ah, so you are come!’ said he.

‘Yes,’ said Phœbe.

It was not much to say, but it was her all. No; things were really not the same. The street-corner was not the back garden, nor was Miss Doyle, the heiress, Phœbe Burden, nor was this man the Stanislas of whom she had dreamed.

‘It is well,’ said her lover. ‘If you did not, there would be dreadful things. But I knew. I said to myself, “You are Adrianski. You have the will of Mesmer. What you will, is done. You shall draw her, if you will, out of a brick wall.”’

He had certainly drawn her out of doors, she was bound to own; and if it was really by

the power of his will, as his deep black eyes seemed to tell, then he had a fascination the more. Phœbe had always been deeply moved by those tales of mystery and sham-psychology which glorify what they call the will power, and mystify young people into thinking themselves philosophers. But still, what was she to say? She ought to have felt herself in a seventh heaven; but she felt nothing of the kind, and wished she had not left her umbrella at home. Stanislas had none either. But then he had no feathers in his hat, so that it did not so much matter—for him.

‘Mademoiselle,’ said Stanislas, ‘I did lay at your feet the heart and the sword of a brave man—of Stanislas Adrianski, in fine. You did pick them up, so to say, “Stanislas, I am yours.” It was one evening, when I jump over the wall. Well, I watch; I wait; the days pass, and the weeks pass, and you never come. You are not ill—no, not even with joy. Simply, you go. I say, it is some mystery here; for that she does not love Adrianski—ah, say that to the pigs, but not to me! I take my violoncello on my back, and I go for a walk, like the *Trovatore*—the man which sings and plays. I take a theatre

engagement—I, who am a nobleman in my own land. It is the bread of exile. But what would you? It is bread, after all. I change my lodge; for you are gone, and they are canaille. I am desperate. But an Adrianski is proud. He cannot stay to be vexed for rent so old he has forgotten. He is more proud because he is poor. I see you at “Olga”—you! And with——’

‘With my father,’ said Phœbe. ‘And indeed—indeed——’

‘Ah! You are rich, mademoiselle; and I am—poor. I comprehend.’ He drew back, in proud humility, and sighed.

‘I have told my father,’ said Phœbe eagerly, ‘I have told him that nothing—nothing like that would make any difference—none.’

‘You have told your father? He knows?’

‘There—now you see if I have been false!’ said she. She had been able to make so few points that she could not afford to throw away the smallest chance of one.

‘And what does he say—that rich Englishman?’ He advanced again, and tried to recover her hand; but she managed to avoid his clasp this time. She could really

believe that there was something magnetic, or mesmeric, or galvanic, or whatever the correct jargon is, about this lover of hers. He repelled her, even though she had told herself that she passionately loved him, and admired him above all the men she had ever seen or ever would see. Raw damp hands cannot make a man the less a count, a hero, a patriot, and a Pole.

‘He said—no, you mustn’t ask me what he said,’ said she; for her father’s words had been of a sort to vulgarise the finest situation in the world. ‘But—I’m afraid—I’m certain, he does not approve.’

‘He will refuse the hand of an Adrianski? He should be more than prince, this milord! It is Adrianski who descends. But never mind; all right; we will see. It is not of this I come to say. Why do I see you to-day? Because, mademoiselle, because this night I leave London; because, it may be, I see you no more again.’

Was it dread or hope, dismay or relief, that came over her in a wave?

‘Leave—London?’ faltered she.

‘Yes; the theatre will change; they will have pantomime—an Adrianski does not play

the jigs for a clown, a buffoon ! But it is not that. I have told you I wait in my exile for what will be to come. My sword is in his sheath ; it waits the word ; the word comes, Draw ! And out he comes.'

'You mean you are going to fight——'

'If it shall please the pigs, yes, made-moiselle. Meanwhile, I go to conjure—to conspire ! I am called. No, not to you I say no more. But before many days you will hear a sound that shall shake the tyrant on his throne. It shall be the voice of the nation which will be heard. You will hear the music of the cannons, and will see the flashing of the swords, and the raining of blood ; and in the middle of the battle you will hear the voice of Stanislas, and see the sword of Adrianski.'

'And——'

'Yes. This night I part. Honour—glory—country, before all. I go to conspire ! It may be, the fall of this head will be the sign of what shall begin. And it will be glad to fall ; because you are rich, and I am poor.'

Even she now forgot to notice that the mist was turning faster and faster into

drizzling rain. She must send her heart to battle with this hero, that was clear.

‘How can I make you believe? How can I tell you how miserable I have been—I am? How can I help you—what can I do?’

‘It may be victory; it may be death; it may be both—it shall be one. Make as if I am to die—for Poland; for you. Take my hand.’

She could not refuse it now, and he held hers tightly.

‘Say, “Stanislas Adrianski, I love you; and I swear.”’

‘You know I do——’

‘Very good; that shall be that you swear. I am glad; I fear no more. And now for the pledge, the pawn, I will give you my own ring—it is cheap, but my jewels are not mine. And you will give me yours, which you will. And when you hear of the charge, you shall say, “My ring was there!”’

There was assuredly some sort of power about the man; even his eloquence had a sort of gloomy vigour that covered the multitude of its sins. And how could she refuse what might be a doomed hero’s parting prayer to the woman whom, next to honour, he adored—her first, last, only proof that she

deserved his prayer? How could she bear to think of him, in the midst of secret dangers and open perils, fighting, worn out, perhaps wounded, flying, imprisoned, tortured—even slain, on the scaffold or on the field—and feel that, living, he misjudged her, and, dead, would never know what a heroine she meant to be?

I fear that to make a list of Phœbe Doyle's faults and follies, since she had become a lady, would take a long and sorry chapter. I am not her champion. She had been sly, sullen, rebellious, weak, wilful—I could easily think of a few more hard names to call her that good girls never deserve. But the light, though it had to find its way through sadly crooked chinks, flashed through her now and then, and I cannot help an instinct that it flashed through her now, though she was rebelliously meeting a forbidden lover by stealth, and though that meeting ended in her pulling off her glove and giving him what he asked for; something for nothing, like a fool; a troth-plight to the sham hero of a half-forgotten dream. I can picture some wise and noble woman, happening (as she may happen) to find in

love her highest duty, driven to meet her knight by stealth, fired with zeal for some noble cause, and proud to think that her last gift will shine in its van—and such, in faith and belief, was Phœbe Doyle.

And so, bearing with him this token of her faith, and having pressed a long kiss upon her ungloved hand, Stanislas Adrianski departed to Poland—to death, it might be; to glory it must surely be. And so Phœbe, half wet through, and thinking many things, went home.

Thursday morning came, and now that Stanislas had changed once more from a formidable fact back into a heroic ideal of whom she would be proud to dream, the prospect of new scenes and new people began to hold out their proper promise to a healthy mind. Her father, all through breakfast, wore a more cheerful air. He went with Phœbe and Mrs. Hassock to the station, and saw them off most amiably, though he rather surprised the housekeeper by letting his only daughter leave him for the first time without giving her a kiss at parting. Perhaps they were Indian manners, thought she, and

though she had seen the usual signs of affection pass between Anglo-Indians, she knew that India is a large place, and contains, no doubt, a variety of customs.

‘But—miss! Your new waterproof! If we haven’t left it behind, I declare!’

Phœbe felt herself turn as hot as fire, and colour up to the eyes.

‘I never got it after all,’ said she. ‘I dare say the old one will do very well.’

‘Yes, miss. Thinking you’d no more use for it, I thought it would be a pity not to wear it out, so I thought I’d do it myself, sooner than waste a thing, which is sinful at the best of times. But, of course, you’re welcome to it, as you’ve changed your mind. I’ve noticed how ladies from India are rather apt to change their minds. But it was a pity you went out in the wet for nothing. Your clothes were just as if you’d been walking about—all alone.’

‘I’d rather you would keep it, Mrs. Hassock,’ said Phœbe with a fainter flush, but a more guiltily conscious one. ‘I don’t want one at all.’

So Mrs. Hassock put this and that together again with more success than before.

The train met with no accident, so the journey from London to Quellsby, the nearest station to Cautleigh, was necessarily uneventful. Not even such a novice in travelling as Phœbe can get any new ideas or sensations worth mentioning from a journey in a railway train. The fields, villages, churches, and stations ran past one another in no more remarkable manner than they pass along the much more wonderful railroad that runs through Phœbe's native land of dreams, and though Cockneys profess to find the country delightful, at least for a little while, I never heard of one who found its features strange. To leave London always feels like going home. It was far more exciting when the train stopped at Quellsby, an exceedingly small station, and when a footman came up to the carriage-door, and, touching his hat, enquired for Miss Doyle. This was a touch of life, for the footman was undeniably real—the most real thing she had seen since she saw her father waving his hand from the platform.

The carriage, with its pair of horses, its coachman and footman, were all that had come to meet her ; but Phœbe was impressed,

and Mrs. Hassock not dissatisfied with the respect paid at the station to ladies who arrived as guests at Cautleigh Hall. If Phœbe had anticipated great things from the country she was doomed to disappointment; if she looked forward to romantic misery, she was destined to the satisfaction of her heart's desire. The seven miles from Quellsby to Cautleigh were as flat and ugly as a Dutchman would wish to see, and mainly ran through moist meadows with unpicturesque curves of wold beyond them. But Cautleigh is a pleasant old-fashioned hamlet enough, with its ancient church and its scattered cottages buried among trees. The winter sun was feebly setting, and the rooks were cawing their last word for the day, as the carriage passed the lodge-gates, and rolled smoothly along the level park drive. Phœbe was really impressed, and was shy of speaking even to Mrs. Hassock, feeling instinctively, as any woman would, that to seem impressed by such things looks ignorant and unbecoming. At last, the long avenue having been passed, the carriage drew up before the Hall itself—a new-old mansion, partly white and partly red, square, ugly, very convenient, and very large,

with a terraced flower-garden in front and on one side, and a pleasant vision of fruit-walls and hothouses beyond, while the park, bounded by now bare plantations, stretched round on every side. It was cold and misty, and the afternoon was failing into twilight, so that the place looked sad and sombre, but full of dignity, and with a promise of infinite comfort within. And this, at last, was Cautleigh Hall, the principal character in this history, and yet never seen until now.

The hall bell clattered and clanged. The door opened. A young man—Phœbe remembered his face at the play-house—came out with a couple of dogs at his heels. He raised his hat.

‘Miss Doyle?’ said he. ‘Welcome to Cautleigh, with all my heart! I’m Ralph Bassett, you know. Mr. Ralph Bassett—Miss Doyle. Our fathers were old friends, so we must be young ones. That’s all your luggage? Here, Stanislas, lend a hand for the small things.’

A man-servant, in plain black clothes, had followed Ralph Bassett from the door. He came forward, to take from the carriage such

small things as parasols and shawls. How odd that he should answer to such a name! Phœbe looked at him for that very reason. And she saw——

Stanislas Adrianski!

CHAPTER IX

MILO

THE flats of Cautleigh Holms were a very Switzerland compared with this unbounded expanse of heath and moss which lay, far more dead and silent than the most leaden sea, under a deep blue sky without a cloud. You knew that you might ride for days together over it, and that the faint mist of the horizon would still be just as far away, and the solitude as profound. The rough and broken road, which joined the opposite points of the horizon with a line as straight as the flight of a crow, only added to the effect of loneliness, because it suggested company that seldom came. It did come, now and then; but even then in such small relays as to add to the effect of loneliness even more; for loneliness cannot be complete without the presence of some human creature to be alone therein. Had this been a year in which

winter fell early, then, instead of black heath and parched moss, scattered with stunted gorse and juniper, would have been seen nothing but a vast white ocean of frozen snow, from which stood out a line of posts at regular intervals to mark the course of the hidden road: for the least infrequent traveller to be met with, summer or winter, was some official messenger in sledge or post-carriage, whom not even Nature must dare to delay. At other times a Jew pedlar would crawl across the landscape like a snail, with his pack for a shell, or a company of gipsies would make their way over the waste by a track known to none but themselves, or a gang of wretched creatures, men and women, some with bound wrists, would be driven, they knew not whither, like a herd of cattle before mounted drovers in uniform. However blue the sky might be, the earth was always bleak, black, and bare—except when it was white, and then it was bleaker and barer still.

Yet, though it may remain invisible for days together, even on this broad steppe there is settled life here and there, and often, perhaps, really less lonely than many who live in the hearts of great cities find their

lives. The post-horses must have stages and stables, and these are the cause of dwellings which, being seldom more than a long day's gallop apart, consider themselves neighbours, even knowing one another's post-horses and drivers by sight, and one another by name. The Jew pedlars brought them wares and news from the more crowded world, and the gipsies gave them music and songs, and, except for the official messengers, for whose sake they existed, there was nobody of whom to be afraid. Civilised life there was rough and coarse, and neither sober nor clean ; but it was well fed, and taken with infinite leisure.

Almost within sight of one of these timber-built shelters that stood in the very heart of the steppe was a smaller wooden building, little better than a mere ground-floor hut, with a sloping roof of planks, and a couple of windows, one on either side of the closed door. Within, it was all one chamber, in which all the furniture consisted of a very low and narrow bed, a table, a chair, and the all-important stove and flue. But there were signs of life there which did not belong to the steppe at all. The bedstead was of painted iron, and therefore clean. The table, or at

least half of it, was piled with books, instruments, writing materials, and even written papers ; and yet larger and more formidable pieces of mechanism, requiring special knowledge to name or describe, leaned in a corner between two of the bare plank walls. Nor, though both windows were closed, was there that overpowering atmosphere of stifled humanity under its most unpleasant conditions which was synonymous, in that region, with being warm and comfortable. As it was, the atmosphere was not too fresh, but was thickened with nothing worse than a cloud of tolerable tobacco.

It was here that, one morning, Philip Nelson woke up—so weak, faint, and helpless that he doubted at first if he was alive. And the labour of doubting was so great that he gave it up, and left the doubt unsolved.

At last his eyes came to conscious life ; and he asked, but in a voice that seemed to him to have no sound at all.

‘Are you an Englishman or a Russian? What am I doing here?’

‘I’m neither—I’m a doctor,’ said an Irish voice out of the tobacco smoke. ‘And ye’re doing nothing—ye’re getting well.’

‘Ah! I have been ill, then? What does it all mean?’

‘Here—drink that. I’ve been expecting ye to wake up this last hour, either dead or alive. And it means ye’re to ask no questions, but to go to sleep again, if ye want to come to life as soon as ye can.’

‘I am alive, then. And, I suppose, it’s thanks to you.’

‘It’s no thanks to anybody at all. It’s thanks to good luck ye didn’t fall into the hands of some necromancing impostor of a Sangrado, like what they have in these parts, that wouldn’t have left a drop of the blood in ye. So hold your tongue about thanks, if ye please, and about everything else too. Here—take another sup of this. Faith, it’s wonderful! Why, ye’ve got no more fever on ye than——’

‘Now look here,’ said Phil, gathering his wits together as well as he was able, ‘I’m not going to excite myself, and I want to get well, and I’m not going to say thank you till I can say it strongly—and I can’t do that now. But the idea of my just turning round again and going to sleep with an easy mind, when—it can’t be done. If you’ll answer me six

questions, I swear to go to sleep and to say nothing more till——'

'Come, be easy——'

'But I can't, till——'

'Well, if ye can't be easy at all, be as easy as ye can. Six questions I'll allow ye, and not one more. Faith, I thought one time ye'd never ask a question again.'

'I am here to survey for a railway. Can you tell me what has happened, while I have been lying here?'

'There's Number One. I'll keep a strict count, and not allow ye one over the tale. But the idea of a man bothering about his work, the first thing! Oh, that's taken good care of itself, ye may be sure. Work always does, if ye don't bother it, and only lave it alone. Why, what the divil are ye up to now?'

'If you can't tell me—if I've got strength to crawl, I must go and find somebody who can.'

'No—there's no fever. I thought 'twas that divil of a fever come back again. I never said I couldn't tell; I only bade ye not to bother, that's all. When I found how you were took, I took the case into my own hands,

and made the young gentleman that was with you do what I told. He wrote for instructions, and there's been a rawboned divil of a Scotchman, with all the fever that's in him gone into his hair, been out here and careerin' all over the bogs like a house on fire—leagues away they'll be, by now.'

'Do you mean to say,' said Phil, trying to raise himself upon his elbow, and falling back upon the bed with what a little more strength would have made a groan—'Do you mean to say that they have sent out another man to do my work while I've been lying here like a log—Heaven knows how long?'

'Number Two ; and a wasted one too, for I'd answered that before. Of course they've sent out another man. And why wouldn't they? It was I told them they must, and 'twas for your own sake I told them. Ye'll have to clear out of this, as soon as ye stir a toe. But as for lying like a log—faith, I've never been medical attendant to a log, but if I had, and if it had taken to telling long yarns, it's more of the price of timber I'd have heard, and less of Phœbe. And 'twas then I first thought I'd pull you through. It's a good sign when a man's raving about a young

woman, instead of snakes and blackbeetles. It shows either he's not bothered his constitution with the drink, which is the divil, or else that he's made his head while he's young—and that's beating the divil with his own stick, any how. But the best way's never to touch a drop—and especially when they sell ye such poison as this,' said the doctor, interrupting his flow of talk to try an experiment on his own person. 'Twould make the spirit of a decent potato feel like an angel in disguise.'

'I suppose when a man's in a fever, he talks like a fool,' said Phil rather savagely. 'I see how it has been. I've been taken ill, and the result is I've lost my place, and another man has stepped into my shoes. What's the matter with me? How soon shall I be well?'

'Number Three and Number Four. As for the matter, I can tell ye the diagnosis in half a word—it's a malarious pyæmia, induced by morbid atmospheric conditions, beginning with febrile miasma, and running into typhoid. As for when ye'll be well—ye're about as well as the College of Physicians can make ye——'

'How soon shall I be at work again?'

'Number Five. Ye're some sort of an

engineer. Let me see—with your constitution ye ought to be pretty fit by the time ye're home again.'

'At home ! I am at home.'

'Then,' said the doctor, trying another experiment of the effect of vodka upon an Irishman, 'I'd say ye'd be setting the worms well to work in maybe a month or so. Ah, my boy, 'tis the worms are the engineers of the world.'

'You mean—I must throw up my post, or die.'

'Number—no : that's not a question, this time. Yes ; I suppose that is about what I mean. Well, 'tis better to throw up a post than a sponge. I see the stuff ye are—a confounded beast of a Saxon, that doesn't die because he won't, and then will die because he won't say he's beat, even by Nature ; but with a drop of the poetry of life in him after all. I don't know Miss Phœbe—but if she's not worth throwing up a trumpery post for, I don't know the pharmacopœia from the cerebellum.'

'Will you be good enough to forget whatever I said in my dreams?'

'And why would I forget till I please, till

ye get your fist back to knock it out of me? Will I think, when a man talks about Phœbe, she's his great aunt twice removed? Why, didn't ye tell the four quarters of the globe she's going to be Mrs. Nelson, and that ye knocked a fiddle to bits over the head of a steam-engine for spouting conic sections to her over a brick wall?'

'Well, it's not good to feel that one isn't master of one's brains. I don't want to die—till I've done something more than be knocked down by a fever and—fail. What's your name?'

'Number Six. My name's Ulick Ronaine.'

'I've often wanted to know the name of the Good Samaritan. Now I know.'

'Bless my soul, if he's not off rambling again!'

'I know how I came here. But how did you? What made you take all this trouble to cure, and nurse, and care for a stranger? What made you——'

'Seven—and eight—and nine! Ye've had your six, and that's seven too many. I'm a man of my word. I said six, and I'll not answer seven—not if 'twas to ask me if I'd be introduced to Miss Phœbe; and if there's one

question would make me say Yes, that's the one. There'll be stuff in a girl that gets into the typhoid of a man like you; 'twas hard for her to get in, but I'll defy Nelaton's own self to get her out again. Here's her health, anyhow. Faith, it's a real pleasure to be able to talk about the girl of one's heart in a strange land. No; never drink, my dear boy, especially in a strange land where you don't know the cork as well as your own cradle.'

He made a third and apparently crucial experiment; for a thickness was coming over his voice which might indeed be a phenomenon of the weariness of Phil Nelson's newly-awakened ears, but certainly sounded as if it were due to something more.

And gradually the voice of Dr. Ronaine became not only thicker in itself, but really more dreamlike, as Phil's senses, unused for so long to work, gave up speculating upon his situation as blank and impossible, and took refuge in torpor. For a physician who forbade talking, he set as good an example as the famous physician and bon vivant whose panacea was starvation.

'Yes; this is the field for a big practice,'

said he. 'Not a surgeon within hail that's got an idea beyond bleeding, nor a physician that wouldn't kill ye a dozen times before he cured ye. It's nothing but the patients it wants to be a bigger field than London, that ye might throw in, and no more find it than the poison in a homœopath's sugarplum. I've been all over the world, pretty near, looking for a practice big enough to stretch one's legs in, and there's something wrong with them all—either there's ten doctors to one patient or else there's one patient to ten doctors, and I won't know which means most ruin. But I'll find it some day, never fear. It's getting bewildering to think of the arrears of fees I'm owed by the world!'

Of course, of course,' said Phil, dropping into confusion and forgetfulness, and echoing the last words he heard; 'what will your fee be?'

'Phœ-be again!' said the doctor. 'I'll begin to think there's heart-trouble; he'd better have took to the drink, after all. But this has been a big case, anyhow. I'll put twenty guineas into the box for the little girl. The bottle empty? Faith, that's queer, when 'twas more than half full not an hour ago.'

'Tis the evaporation, I suppose ; I'll have to put in a ground glass stopper next time. But I must get a taste of something—that patient of mine has talked me as dry as a fish out of water. He won't hurt for the minute it'll take me to get a makeshift of that thief of a postmaster's infernal vodka. I'm afraid I'll have to borrow from the little girl's money-box again—but I can put it down, and as I'm going to put in twenty guineas, 'twill be a gain of over twenty pounds to the little girl. “Ulick Ronaine, M.D. ; Dr. to Zenobia, nine hundred and eighty-three pounds, four shillings and fivepence-halfpenny.” Faith, ye're an heiress—'tis a lucky godfather ye found in me, anyhow.'

It was thus that Philip Nelson came to life again ; and it was with the name of Phœbe on his lips, and for the first conscious thought in his brain. Of course he knew that the thought was really more mad than his delirium had been, and hoped that so extreme a proof of feebleness was only a part of the intolerable bodily weakness that would no doubt pass away at last in due time. He was very far indeed from being one of those lovers who

hug their chains, and revel in despair, and are proud of constancy. Such things seemed to belong to the rhyming nonsense and stage-business that Phil Nelson scorned with all his heart and soul. When he went to Russia in that sudden way, he had meant to be a man, and to break the growth of useless and wasted feelings in two. There was the work of his life before him—why should he, like a hero of one of Phœbe's story-books, throw it all up in a pet because a girl did not care for him, and make a conceited merit of laziness and uselessness for the rest of his days?

And, so far, he had certainly done very well. He had written home a few rather short and formal letters to the father who, he knew quite well, neither understood nor cared to understand any of his concerns, but he had received none in return, and knowing his father's manners and customs, had not been in the least dissatisfied at receiving none from him any more than from Phœbe. The receipt of a letter from either would have been matter for surprise. He had certainly received a dozen lines from Dick, combining eleven of tomfoolery with one of sense in the form of a request for a small loan. That had

been the whole extent of his home news. His work had been both new enough and hard enough to interest him and absorb him wholly ; he felt he had been doing it well, and went at it harder than there was any need to go. He did not even do it with the conscious desire of revenging himself upon a girl, by some day posing before her as a great and rich man whom she had lost by her short-sighted folly. Had he been capable of such a plan, it would have lost him the self-respect needful to make it succeed.

Even so did Milo the wrestler know that he could break in two any tree that the forest held. And one day he saw an oak sapling, but scorned to break what to him would have been but mere child's play—he would let it grow for a while. And then, when the time came for him to rend it, for his honour's sake, he found he had waited too long ; the oak had not been waiting to grow—and we know the end. Phœbe's weak hand still held Philip as the oak tree held Milo. And if anybody wonders how a hand like Phœbe's should hold a heart like Phil's, then let him wonder at the story of the oak sapling and the wrestler, and at all Nature and human nature

besides. Weak things are the only things that are strong. The ivy is the real oak, after all ; and it is the oak himself who clings.

So he lay there in his hut in the middle of a steppe of which nobody at home cared to remember the name ; his very whereabouts being of personal interest to none but a drunken Samaritan ; picturing, in spite of his reason, the life of Phœbe Burden. He saw her wasting the precious hours of the days, and the precious days of life, over fancies less excusable than fevers, and despicable dreams. He saw the vision of an impossible marriage, in which she would have made him miserable, and he her. He asked himself, sixty times a minute, how and why he could ever have lost his head—he did not call it his heart—to such a child, who could no more see the beauty of the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid than he could see why a story should be written in three volumes instead of the obviously more appropriate number of none. He despised himself for feeling himself such a fool about such a girl—a child with wonderful eyes and magnetic lips, which nevertheless did not keep her from back-garden flirtations with fiddlers, or billiard-markers, or pickpockets, or what-

ever was plain English for Stanislas Adrianski. And yet coming back to life had meant coming back to her. Could it mean that life and Phœbe were one? That would be terrible indeed.

‘Here—take down this,’ said the doctor, after what had seemed to Phil only one long restless thought, but which must—since it was broad daylight and since he remembered nothing outside himself—have run into another long sleep which might have been for days for anything he could tell. ‘’Tis chicken tea; we must begin to put the life into ye. And I’ll tell ye what we’ll do—for to think of your staying on here, and hanging about your work like the ghost ye are, is nonsense that I won’t stand, as a medical adviser that’s just at present able to floor ten of ye. I’ll take ye home with me, as soon as ye’re able to floor a fly.’

The doctor was not a pleasant-looking nurse this morning, for he was ugly by nature, and his eyes, clothes, hair, and skin told tales of a night not wholly devoted to professional duties and charities. The post-house was not without attractions where it was the only substitute for tavern, club, and theatre. But Phil could not help being struck by a delicacy

and gentleness of touch, almost womanlike in its simplicity, and curiously contradicted by a decision of manner which, under all the other circumstances, could only be due to the doctor's having so far been faithful to his own principles as to have made his own head when he was young.

'Thank you,' said Phil. But it was less for the offer than out of a general sort of gratitude which must needs speak, though too proud, shy, and reticent to run into a gush of words.

'Ye've got enough cash, I suppose,' said the doctor, 'to take ye home?'

'I suppose so—though now I've got to throw this up I don't suppose the firm will care to keep on a man who can do nothing better than break down, and is bowled over by a breath of bad air. And what you must have been spending for me, I don't know. But I suppose there'll be enough left to carry us back to London—if that's where you want to go. If you'll hand me that leather case, I'll soon see.'

'Now, of all the stupid, thick-headed numskulls of the world, give me a Saxon to beat them all! As if I'd finger the penny of a soul

that's down on his luck—let alone a fine young fellow like you. If ye were a duke, now—that might be another pair of brogues. I thought ye might want a touch of help yourself; and though my own fortune's in a state of arrear, there's a little girl of mine that's good enough to let me borrow of her at a pinch, till I'll pay her back, with good interest, all in good time. I was reckoning only last night she's worth near a thousand pounds; not a bad notion for a fine young fellow like you, that would turn a paltry thousand into a plum, in the twinkling of half an eye. If ye can't have Miss Phœbe, have a try for Zenobia, my boy—a girl with a thousand pounds to her back isn't to be sneezed at, as I'm old enough to know.'

CHAPTER X

THE LOST LEADER

It was a great night for the Associated Robespierres. The Queen's Head, hitherto unknown save to a few people who lived a little to the north of Holborn, was henceforth to become famous in history. That little upper room, with a long kitchen-table, a dozen hard chairs with open backs, and a row of hat-pegs for all its furniture, and with a framed advertisement of bottled ale for all its artistic attraction, was to be the scene of an act that would throw Runnymede itself into the shade. The Grand President was in his place at the head of the table, smoking a long churchwarden, and with a tumbler of hot rum and water at his elbow. History delights to record the favourite beverages of her great men. To the left sat three, to the right sat three, of the society which had sat upon the future welfare of England any number of

Saturday nights for any number of years, and whose mature and patient wisdom was to-night to pronounce itself ready for action. Seven may be thought but a small minority when compared with the forty and odd millions of Britons who were not, as yet, Associated Robespierres. But quality is not to be measured by quantity, nor force by number—every triumphant majority has been a minority once upon a time.

They were, for the most part, grave, solid, silent men, with the air of profound and unimpassioned wisdom that should belong to the fathers of their country. There was nothing about any of them that suggested the hot-headed and fiery enthusiasm of the working tailor, or the grimmer or more deeply-burning indignation of his neighbour the shoemaker. These were quiet, placid, philosophic-looking men, one and all, save perhaps their president, and he was not very much otherwise. It evidently took them long to think, and long to speak. No doubt their action would be correspondingly swift, sudden, and sure. Even on this important night they showed no want of deliberation, no impatience to shake the fruit which had

taken years to ripen. They sat, and smoked, and sipped in silent but pregnant harmony. Yet they were not wholly without suitable signs of action even now. From time to time, an attendant without a coat, and with shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbow, brought in another steaming tumbler of rum, took the money for it, and vanished.

At length the Grand President struck his fist upon the table, and made the glasses tingle. 'Silence, gentlemen!' said he. 'Order! We are going to begin.'

One would have thought 'Silence!' as fittingly addressed to an oyster-bed, and 'Order!' to a congregation of Quakers.

'And strangers,' said the Grand President again, 'will withdraw.' Whereupon the waiter—not that he was by any means a stranger—withdrew.

'Mr. Grand President and gents all,' said a fat Robespierre with a husky voice at the immediate right of the chair, 'I dare say you'll excuse my rising, because we'll leave that to the country, if needful, and I'm one of them that can speak better off my legs than on; I'm not a born orator, like our Grand, that doesn't signify whether he's on his head or his

heels—it's all one to him. Now, as the Committee appointed to frame a new constitution for this enlightened but benighted land, I've been sitting, I may say, while I've got a leg to sit on, and I've worked it all out in a way that'll be safe to commend itself to the very meanest capacity. I'm not one to go beating about the bush, which isn't written in rose-water, and which good wine needs none. I've gone, I may say, straight as the die to the pole, and sat between two stools without upsetting the apple-cart or getting up a tree. And my opinion is, things are as bad as bad, and there's only one way to mend them, and that's to make a sweep clean, and begin at the other end, and go on, always upper and upper and upper, till we get to the very root of the matter and the regular bottom of things. Now in the first place there's the dairy question—a red-hot burning question that makes a man turn cold in his grave. How's a man to get an honest living when a Government spy is suborned by the helmeted mermaidens of the law to come tasting his milk on false pretences, and putting in chalk and things, and lead into his scales, and fat into his butter, when all the time he knows as well as the

trade that chalk's the finest thing going for the inside, if people wouldn't be prejudiced, and see themselves as others see them with their own eyes? And so the first thing your Committee recommends——'

'Question—question, Mr. Committee, if you please,' interrupted the shrill voice of the chair. 'It is of course intended to abolish every form of meddling in other people's business, whether it's in the shape of gas or taxes. For what else are we here? But butter, and cheese, and eggs will keep—what won't keep is the land. How about the land?'

'Having,' began the speaker, 'disposed of the dairy question—not that eggs will keep much over their time, though I must say some people are more particular than they need to be, thinking they ought to get new-laid eggs when they only pay for fresh, as if they thought eggs ran contrary to human nature, and laid themselves over again every day; and so, having done that, I'll come to the land, which hangs on to the dairy question like a pump on to its own handle. I've thought of the land; maybe there's not many that's thought more. I've got a geography book at home, and I got my Joe, who's got a

figure-head like a man-o'-war, to work out the whole thing by a sum in long division. Something like a sum it was—went into five-and-twenty figures and seven over; and he's not nine years old. So he found, if the country was divided among every man, woman, and child in England, there'd be just about an acre apiece for every one of them. Now as that's so, it's clear how Nature meant it so to be. So give it 'em, says I.'

'I second that motion,' said one of the five Robespierres who had not yet put in a word. And then ensued a long deliberative pause.

'Carried unanimously,' said the Grand President, 'that every man, woman, and child in England shall have an acre of land—division to take place as soon as it becomes practicable. Now, Mr. Committee—go on.'

'Having disposed of the dairy question, and put the land, I may say, into a nutshell, I now, therefore,' continued the Committee, 'beg leave to state that that's about as much as one pair of brains could be looked for to do. Things that have been puzzling human nature for millions and millions of years aren't to be settled as you might say "Jack Robinson."

I've thought out the dairy, and worked out the land in a sum with twenty-five figures in it and seven more over. "An acre apiece, and no meddling with the milkman"—that's your cry. Ah, the thinking I've gone through to get at that, nobody would believe that hasn't tried !'

'Is there anybody else here present,' asked the Grand President, 'who has got an idea? But before he lays it on the table, I move that strangers be readmitted. Tom !'

The stranger returned, with a fresh supply of the stimulant which high thinking needs, and then withdrew as before. And then a weak and smothered voice declared itself from behind its own especial cloudlet of steam.

'My idea's this. No levelling down. This is the age of progress, Mr. Nelson, sir—Mr. Grand, I should say; and I, for one, won't be the fly on that wheel. Another gentleman in my own profession was saying to me on Tuesday, "Curtis, whatever are we to do with that bothering House of Lords?" "What would you do with them yourself, Blenkhorn?" says I. "Level 'em down," says he. And that's the way some do talk. But what does it come to? Where'd you be the better if you made

every marquis in England cut his own hair and shave himself for sixpence instead of going to a regular professor? 'Twould be no good to anybody; the profession would be robbed, and the marquis wouldn't dare to come out in November for fear of being took for a guy. Level up! That's my motto! I say make everybody a lord and a lady—and then everybody will be equal and up at the top together, instead of being a jumble of tops and bottoms, like they are now.'

'Carried unanimously,' said the Grand President, 'that every man, woman, and child in England shall be a duke and duchess. Gentlemen, this is a regular cave of harmony! and yet they take us for democrats and demogorgons—us, gentlemen, of whom every one has this Saturday night made himself and all his fellow-countrymen landowners and lords! For myself, I simply propose to abolish the rates, the taxes, the gas, the water, the milk——'

'The milk, Mr. Grand?' exclaimed the original land reformer, showing a sparkle of animation for the first time. 'I must ask you, Mr. Grand, that that expression be withdrawn.'

'I will omit the milk, Mr. Committee.

That is a subject on which there may be differences of opinion, I am aware. But the taxes, the rates, the gas, the water, the coals, and all duties imposed upon the necessities of life, such as tobacco, and malt, and alcohol. And I would compel the diffusion of cheap literature, for a duke sitting all alone on his own acre, which might chance to be the top of a mountain, might find time hang a bit, unless he'd something cheap to read. I'd have every book sold for a penny apiece, and if they couldn't print the big ones at the price, I'd have the books boiled down to fit the penny. Carried, gentlemen, I presume? Carried unanimously. What is the next thing to be done? But I think that we have already done pretty well, and that we may indulge in a little melody. Mr. Committee, I call upon you for a song. "I'm Afloat" will be just the thing.'

'There's one more little thing, though,' said another Robespierre from the farther end of the table. 'I thought Mr. Committee would have noticed it; but, as he hasn't been able, and as it won't take more than a minute, and won't disturb this convivial harmony, we'd better have it over. It's the public

funds, and the government annuities, and things of that kind. I don't know much about 'em myself, but there's many that do, and I'm given to understand, on the best authority, that how they're all a public swindle, that allows the rich to fatten on the poor. We must have the National Debt abolished the very first thing, and then, Mr. Grand and gents, all the rest will come.'

'I second that,' said his next neighbour. 'I have nothing to do with such big debts as that, and it's a shame and a disgrace to feel that one's own native mother country can't pay her debts; and if she won't pay 'em, it's worse still. I know what happened to me once when I couldn't pay one of mine that I didn't justly owe. County-courted I was, and judgment-summonsed, and the Queen's Hotel, Holloway. I had to pay. And sauce for the goose is——'

'Gentlemen,' said the Grand President, suddenly rising in his place with nervous haste, 'I—I can only say that I am amazed—astounded—thunderstruck—I may even say surprised. Why, the National Debt, gentlemen—the National Debt, and more particularly the government annuities—why,

they're the very keystone of our greatness—an oasis in the desert—the palladium of British liberty. Touch the National Debt, gentlemen, and you undo what it has taken generations to rebuild. The Three per Cents, gentlemen, and more especially the government annuities, are sacred things; and I say, sooner let the land remain in the grasp of feudal tyrants; let dukes be counted on the fingers of one hand and the toes of one foot; let milk——'

'Milk, Mr. Grand?' interrupted the Committee. 'I'll be obliged by your leaving milk alone. There are some things that years of thought——'

'Let milk,' cried the Grand President with resolution, 'go the way of rates, and taxes, and gas, but let the National Debt flourish like the upas-tree—our bulwark and our pride. Mr. Committee, I call upon you for a song.'

But it was as if a real thunderbolt had fallen into the midst of the seven sages. It was more than mortal could understand. They were proud of their leader's eloquence, but prouder still of the advanced spirit which halted and quailed at nothing—their leader in

fact as well as in name. Such Conservatism as this seemed downright drunken ; but among these seasoned sots drunkenness was unknown. They could only stare and open their mouths ; they even forgot the use of the entrance thus made.

‘ You object to the abolition of the funds, Mr. Grand ? ’ said one at last, or two together.

‘ I do, gentlemen. Most distinctly I do. ’

‘ One would really believe he had something in ’em himself, ’ said he who had proposed to deal in so original a fashion with the House of Peers.

‘ And if I had something in ’em, sir, ’ said the Grand President quickly, ‘ may I ask what’s that to you ? ’

He who made the remark was struck silent ; but the Committee took up the word.

‘ Because, Mr. Grand, ’ said he, ‘ a man who is blind to the wrongs of milk, not to speak of eggs, and has an interest in keeping up things as they are, and not making them what they aren’t, is no truly Associated Robespierre. And if he happens to be P.G.P.A.R. as you, Mr. Grand, happen Perpetual for the present to be——’

‘Mr. Committee,’ said the admiral, ‘I am sorry to see in you an inconsiderate person, who only desires to reform society because he was once fined ten shillings and costs for——’

‘Inconsiderate? I am not an inconsiderate person, and I’m not a person at all. And if it comes to calling names—you’re another, Mr. Grand. Inconsiderate, indeed! What do you mean by that, I should like to know? And what do you want to inform society for, if you please? You’re a fundholder, Mr. Grand, and that’s what nobody here can say of me!’

‘Divide!’ was called from the corner of the table whence the motion had come.

Was the National Debt to be abolished or no? It was an exceeding difficult question to decide. For, though there were signs that the milkman represented a somewhat factious opposition, still the eloquence of the Grand President had by no means been thrown away.

‘I will not put from this place a question that would annihilate the very axioms of society,’ declared the admiral. ‘I will not rob the widow and the orphan to glut the maw of a ravening milkman, who wants an

acre of land to keep a cow. I distinctly refuse.'

'You—a common scribbling lawyer's clerk——'

'I'm not, sir ; I'm a gentleman at large.'

'Maybe you won't be at large for long——'

'Divide!'

There was no mistaking the feeling of the house this time. The authority of the chair was gone. Eloquence could not conquer the fact that the trusted leader of the Associated Robespierres had boasted of being a gentleman at large, and had not denied that he was a fundholder. Just for a handful of silver he had left them. Never could it be glad confident morning again.

'Divide!'

The National Debt was abolished by a majority of six to one.

The Grand President rose, while an awful silence reigned.

'Gentlemen,' said he, beginning in an extraordinarily deep voice, that rose higher and higher as he went on, 'this is an evil day for England. You will live to regret this day. For me, I can only consider you, considered collectively, as one milkman and five

fools. I shake the dust of this chair from my feet, and will devote the remainder of my talents to the Maintenance of Things as they Are.'

And so he left his chair to the milkman, and the room, and the Associated Robespierres to pay for his last tumbler of rum.

'There's the ingratitude of human nature,' thought the admiral as he walked homeward. 'It's all self—self—self—at the bottom of everything going. However, some sort of a crisis was bound to come; only I never hoped it would come so quickly. Political associations like that are all very well while one's young, but they're more than a man can afford who's got anything to lose. I'm well out of it, and before I've paid my subscription, too. But I didn't think they'd be quite so ready to let me go. They might have asked me to stay, if only to give me the pleasure of saying, "Go and be hanged." Well, I said it without their asking. I'll soon find a better sort of a club than that now, to spend a stray evening in. The notion of confiscating the National Debt! Absurd. And government annuities! There's one comfort,

they won't do it in my day; and after me, they may do what they please. What a contemptible thing selfishness is, to be sure! And what a set of selfish, ungrateful, conceited upstarts all milkmen always are.'

It was not to the old house in the shabby terrace that the ten thousandth victim of political intrigue and of popular fickleness and ingratitude returned. It was to a larger and newer house in a newer, if not much better, suburb, which wore an air of retired tradesmanhood and of respectable competence all round. Nor, as of old, did he fumble at the door with a large iron key, or, failing that, rap with his umbrella till it should be opened to him by Phœbe or one of the boys.

This time he made use of a regular knocker, and pulled a bell—though the latter, since the wire had become slack, was a mere form—and was admitted by a real maid-of-all-work, as different from Phœbe as any professional from a mere amateur. It was quite clear that the mission of the Robespierres had become obsolete, and that things were no longer so completely as they ought not to be. It is true that the vision of the interior, as seen through the open door, did not suggest

luxury, nor even comfort. There were too many signs of unwiped boots, there was too little light, too many broken banisters, and too much smell of dust and onions. In these regards, the general effect had not improved. But it was a great advance to see an unbroken knocker from the outside, and to have it answered by a real girl.

'There's a gent called to see you in the parlour,' said she.

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed the admiral; 'who could possibly want to see me? What's his name?'

'He doesn't have no name,' said the girl; 'least, he didn't give none to me.'

'Better luck next time then, eh, Maria?' chuckled the admiral, thus causing Maria to blush and giggle. 'Tisn't the milk—I mean the taxes, eh?'

'He don't look like taxes,' said Maria. 'He looks more like spoons. I locked up the best ones, and I put him into the parlour, 'cause there's nothin' there he could turn into a threepenny-bit, lest it's the fireirons, and them we wants new.'

'Why didn't you say I was out?'

'So I did, but he only says, "Never mind,

I'll wait," and walks in, before I could bang the door to ; but I've locked up the spoons, what of 'em there were.'

'Well, we'll soon see,' said the admiral, hanging up his coat and hat, and smoothing down his hair with a broken clothes-brush that lay handy. Then he walked into the parlour, a rather less tidy room than the old one, and could not help giving a little start and cry of not over-delighted surprise. For there, standing on the hearthrug, he saw Phil.

He was certainly surprised, and as certainly displeased ; for this son, with his stern, steady, uncomfortable ways, was a standing and reproachful enigma to the father. But whatever one may feel within, one must show a bright new knocker to the world, and a father's heart must not look closed, even though the returned son may not possess the claims of a prodigal.

'Why—why, Phil, my boy !' said he, holding out first his left and then his right hand ; 'this is an unexpected sort of a thing. Why, I thought you were in Russia, or Prussia, and—won't you sit down ?'

'Yes, father,' said Phil, hardly caring to affect any particular impulse of filial joy.

‘I’ve been ill, with some sort of marsh-fever, and had to come home.’

‘Ah, marsh-fever, that sounds bad. I’ve had a touch of the rheumatics myself. But you look pretty right again now, eh? I suppose as we didn’t know you were coming, you won’t mind pigging it a bit with some of the boys?’

‘I’ve got a bed out.’

‘Oh, then you’re not going to stay? I’m sorry, but of course you know your own business best; you always were the one to know that, I must own. And you’re not the least bit of the way up a tree? Doctor’s bill all paid?’

‘I’ve got money enough till I get some more, and——’

‘You don’t want money? And you won’t stay? Phil, my dear, dear boy, I’m as glad to see you as if somebody had given me fifty pounds. Do sit down, and make yourself at home.’

‘And I was going to say, I had an Irish diamond of a doctor, who is such a bear that he won’t hear me speak of a fee. He’s made a man of me, and now he won’t let me behave like a man.’

‘Bless my soul! The very next time I get the rheumatics I’ll go to that doctor, Phil. He must be a first-rate man, that doctor of yours.’

Phil had been hoping and dreading for the last half-hour that the parlour-door would open, and that he would be compelled to meet the eyes and hear the voice which he had once made up his mind never to see and hear again. Of one thing he was sure—he neither could, nor would, ask after her; he wanted to know so much that to ask was simply impossible. He had not even asked the strange maid-servant if the young lady was at home.

‘No, there are plenty of good fellows knocking about,’ said Phil. ‘Why the firm, when I went to them the first thing, and told how matters were, they didn’t send me about my business for an impostor who couldn’t do a stroke of work without breaking down; they paid me up my full wages, even for the time I was ill, though they had to pay a stronger man to do the work, and are sending me down to report on a big drainage affair down in the country; so you see I’ve fallen on my legs, thanks to them. But how is it I

never heard you'd moved? It was only by the merest chance I found you out at all. I began to be afraid—— But it's not that, anyhow. I went to the terrace; nobody knew where you'd gone. I went to Mark & Simple's; they said you'd left them for good, and didn't know anything. So I went to Dick's place in the City; he wasn't there, of course; and if I hadn't found a messenger there who was open to a shilling, nobody would have told me, even there; the old clerks took me, I expect, for one of Dick's friends, and the young ones for a dun. What does it all mean?'

'H'm—ha—well, the truth is, Phil, what with the rheumatics and things, I felt I ought to retire from copying-work, and have a little peace and comfort for the rest of my days. I've not had too much in my time.'

'And you have the means?'

'Well, you see, what with one thing and another, a bit here and a bit there, I manage to scramble on. Things are changed a bit for the better, as you see.'

So Phil did see; but entirely failed to understand how. The better house, the servant, his father's retirement from crust-

winning, better clothes and a general air of prosperity—all were absolutely inconsistent with the possibilities of human nature. Suddenly an idea struck him that made his heart turn faint and sick. Some letter must have failed to reach him out in Russia. Had Phœbe found a husband, and was it he who found all these other things?

‘How is—Phœbe?’ he brought out with an effort which made the question sound like ‘What have you done with her?’ to the admiral’s startled ears.

‘Oh Lord!’ he exclaimed in thought, while he stood looking scared; ‘what was it I said about Phœbe to the boys? Dead? No; that was to—let me see—gone away?’

‘I have so much to learn,’ said Phil, seeing the strange look on his father’s face. ‘Is she—is she—well?’

‘I—I hope so; I hope so, I’m sure,’ stammered the admiral, trying to bring the wits together which this terrible son of his always managed somehow to scare away; ‘I hope she’s pretty well.’

‘Father, in Heaven’s name, what do you mean?’

‘Ah, I’ve got it! She’s gone off, Phil, my

boy; and I've registered a solemn vow never to hear that young woman's name mentioned again. So we'll change the subject. I want to take down the name and address of that medical man who doesn't want fees. I'm pretty well at present, but it's always as well to know.'

'With whom?'

Phil's voice was as steady and cold as a rock, and his heart as heavy.

'Ah!' said the admiral; 'that's just what I'm blessed if I know.'

'And you've made no search; you don't know if—oh, this is too much to bear!'

'Eh? Well, it is bad and ungrateful of her, I must say. But when a girl will go, let her go—it's the only way, say I. If she don't one way, she will another. But you see, it's all mixed up with the Three per Cents. Touch 'em, and down they go. She was a nice girl, too, and I miss her at tea-time, for she wasn't a bit like the boys. But—well there. Won't you stay and see the boys?'

Phœbe lost! He knew half her faults, and yet it seemed to him as if an angel had fallen, and then he heard that grand tenor

voice charming the soul out of her, and he knew at least the name of the devil who had ruined her, and wished he had crushed the creature in his hands instead of letting it go.

‘No, thank you, father; I am going to work,’ said he, and he knew in his heart that work must be the whole end now, on this side the grave.

CHAPTER XI

OUT OF SIGHT

SUCH news as this of Phœbe drove all else out of Phil's mind, or he might have given a few minutes of more rational and natural wonder to the altered circumstances in which he found his father. These were all the more remarkable for its being now impossible to connect them with the disappearance of Phœbe. But, as it was, his whole idea of life had received a deadly blow. Of course the girl was flighty, feather-brained, romantic, and even silly—so much he knew, because Love is as quick to see faults as to ignore them; his famous bandage is placed over his unhappily keen eyes not by nature, but by his own hands. But this thing had never entered into his heart, even in its most jealous moments, to conceive. He had been more miserable about her than he knew—but for himself, not for her. She had always

been, with all her faults, the one bright flower in a world of weeds; the one saving touch in that forlorn and shiftless thing which the Nelsons called home. She had been the one thread of softness in the straight, hard road he had marked out for his own feet to travel. And now—what had become of her? Why could she not have loved him a little, if only that she might have been saved?

‘I will give up loving her!’ his heart groaned. ‘I’ll only find her, and save her, if it makes her hate me—if she’s to be saved in this world. I’ll force myself to hate her—and I’ll save her, just because I hate her with all my heart. Poor little girl!’

But where was she to be found? Vermin like Stanislas Adrianski are apt to vanish when wanted, and only to appear again in unexpected places and at wrong times. To find them, one must turn over the middens of every big town between San Francisco and Astrakhan; and then they may be in Melbourne or Cape Town all the while. They change their trades and their names, and even their features sometimes; and nobody ever knows anything about them, because nobody ever wants to know. Phœbe

might, at this moment, be deserted and starving in some Parisian garret, desperate for daily bread, and exposed to all the hideous temptations that those who have ever hungered alone can know. Or, if the end was not yet come, it must needs come in no long time. But how can words tell what Philip Nelson foresaw? Save her, indeed! It was worth murdering one's own brother to save any girl on earth from such a doom.

However, he had made up his will to love her no more. Apart from his duty towards a sister in deadly danger, he would, as he called it, play the man, and plod on in his straight, hard road with his eyes fixed and his heart closed. Whatever he would have done had he never heard these tidings, he must do now, and the smallest things, and therefore the hardest, all the more, if only out of defiance, and to prove to himself that he was master of himself, and that his will was his slave—not knowing that the man who believes in the strength of his own will incurs the peril of him who trusts to the strength of a straw. So, instead of spending the night, like one of Phœbe's heroes, in a desperate walk to no-

where, or relieving himself by a plunge into what their biographers call, in their tongue, some haunt of dissipation, he went straight to the lodging which he was, till he should leave London, sharing with Ronaine. He would not even allow himself the luxury of being alone. To do what one liked was, of necessity, weakness in the eyes of Phil. He must now carefully watch for opportunities of thwarting and crushing himself at every turn.

‘Ah,’ cried the now familiar brogue, as he entered. ‘Here he comes, the best patient to cure, and the worse to nurse, that ever I knew. Nelson, let me introduce ye to my friend Esdaile, who’s the greatest painter in London. Esdaile, this is my friend Nelson, who’s the biggest engineer I know, bar none. But he’s bad to nurse—he’s got engineering notions about the human machine, and thinks it goes by steam. Ye should have come with us to The Old Grey Mare, Phil, my boy, as I wanted ye, instead of going off about work the first thing. It isn’t the work a man lives by—it’s the meat and the drink ; and if a man don’t eat and drink, neither shall he work—and that’s true.’

‘Nelson?’ asked Esdaile, accepting the introduction with a nod; ‘no relation to our old friend?’

‘What? Meaning the admiral? I’d think not, indeed! Why, he’d have known all about Zenobia, my little girl; and he’s never heard of her, except from me. But I’ll introduce him—and maybe—who knows? We’re both of us fathers, Esdaile; we’ll have to give her away. Faith, there’ll have to be six of us though, counting poor—I mean that infernal woman-hating blackguard, Jack Doyle. I’d like to see the thundering scoundrel again, just to knock him down with one fist and shake hands with the other. But ye don’t look the thing to-night, Phil, at all. Ye’ve begun bothering too soon. I hope ye’ve had no bad news?’

‘I’m quite well,’ said Phil roughly, in a tone that had no effect on the doctor, who was by this time familiar with what he called the Saxon in his friend, but which must have made Esdaile set him down as an ill-conditioned bear. ‘For that matter, I must be well. I’m going out of town, to report on draining some marsh lands——’

‘And you just well from the marsh-

fever? Are ye mad? As your medical attendant, I forbid ye to go. Ye'll just stay here.'

'No, Ronaine. I must go.'

'There's something wrong with ye to-night, Phil—I saw it with half an eye, as soon as ye came home. I thought 'twas the work. But as it's not that—if it's anything stuck in the heart, have it out like a man, and never mind Esdaile; he'll mix the medicine meanwhile. 'Tis Miss Phœbe? Ah, I'd give half the practice I'll get some day, and all I've got now, to be able to feel like a fool about any girl ye like to name. And so'd Esdaile; faith, it's we're the fools, that have done with fooling. 'Tis Miss Phœbe, then, after all?'

'Good-night,' said Phil, unprepared for the strength of this straw, and, in spite of his manhood, which was true enough, feeling painfully like a boy. 'I shall see you again—before I go.'

'That's kind of ye! But look here, Phil. Never mind Esdaile—he won't count, between friends. You won't quarrel, least of all over a girl. I've been through it all myself—twenty times, till I got so used to it that,

faith, if a girl hadn't jilted me, I'd have had to jilt her, for after things have got to a certain sort of climax, ye see there's nothing else to be done. Jilted! 'Tis having had all the fun of the fair, and nothing to pay. I wouldn't give a bottle of vodka for a girl that's got so little love in her that she hasn't got more than enough for one boy. I wouldn't——'

'Good-night, Ronaine,' said Phil, more gently, and holding out his hand. 'You're right—whoever I quarrel with, it'll never be with you. You saved my life; and I've got to make it fit for saving.'

'Why, then, you're a good lad after all, and if ye weren't a Saxon, ye might be an Irishman, by the soul of ye! I'll tell ye what I'll do. I'll swear a mighty oath, and Esdaile here shall bear witness—I'll swear on the bones of all my fathers, born and unborn, from their crania down to their brogues, and on my own right hand that's holding yours, and on anything else ye like to name, that ye shall marry my Zenobia; and she's worth twenty Phœbes, by near a thousand pounds, that'll may be ten before I die. Ye shall marry my Zenobia—and

here's her health, and her husband's that is to be. And she'll make ye as good a wife, though I say it myself, as if she was a bit cut out of your own soul.'

'Who is your amiable friend,' asked Esdaile as soon as Phil left the room, 'that you're so anxious to give him your sixth share in a daughter you don't know, and in a fortune that's got to be made? Of course you can give your Zenobia, you know. But can you give him Marion Bassett, and Eve Esdaile, and Psyche Urquhart, and Dulcibella Nelson, and Jane Doyle?'

'Oh, they'll do for the bridesmaids. And one will be enough for him. I'll give him Zenobia, and the others may stay away—if they can. And, as to the fortune, it's as safe as the Bank of England; for I look on that as a debt of honour—and honour's a sacred thing.'

'And, talking of Dulcibella Nelson, who's your future son-in-law? You call him Phil Nelson—and, oddly enough, I happen to remember that our friend the admiral had a boy who answered to the name of Phil, and a very dirty, ragged little boy he was too, always counting his fingers and gnawing a slate-

pencil. I expect I kept him in boots for a considerable while.'

'Oh, there's lots of Nelsons. Why this Phil's a big gun in Russian railroads, and had a fever it was a real credit to know. He's a gentleman, every inch of him, and no more like the admiral than I'm like King Lear or Desdemona. And he's never heard of Zenobia—and 'tis impossible he'd never have heard of the little thing if he'd been the admiral's boy.'

'Well, anyhow, Philip Nelson doesn't mean a straw more than it matters. He's welcome to my share in Miss Eve——'

'Miss Zenobia, if ye please. I've nothing to do with Miss Eve.'

'In Miss Burden, then. Seeing that I bought out—commuted for her boot-bill in the lump—perhaps I've lost the right to interfere. Only I do grudge your son-in-law one thing.'

'And what's that? Why, I don't grudge the boy all my savings of the last twenty years! Didn't I bring him out of the jaws of death with my own hands? And would ye have me turn an ungrateful blackguard on him now?'

‘I mean—her eyes, if they’re anything like that child’s.’

‘There, then—I’m the only real father out of the lot of ye,’ said Ronaine. ‘And I’ve earned the right to choose her husband—and I will, too. Phil Nelson’s the man—as fine a case of malarious typhoid as I’ll ever see.’

Philip Nelson did not fall asleep soon, but, when he did, he slept soundly, and with no dreams that he could recall. Yet, when he woke, it was with a feeling of feverish stupor, as if he had not slept the whole night through. It cost him some slight effort to remember, all at once, the whole history of yesterday, and a far stronger effort to return to the resolute frame of mind with which it had closed. All things at first were so hopelessly bleak and bare. And when at last he gathered himself together stoutly enough to face the day, he was certain of only two things—that he must live for his work in life, and that he must save Phœbe from the worst, not for his own sake, but for hers, and for hers alone.

What can the weak know of the weakness of the strong? No weak man can ever feel wholly weak—for he can blind his eyes, and fly;

may it is he who is made to seek and to find the strength that is no man's own. But the light of life had gone out for Phil, and he knew no other. Is this a history of heathens? So it seems—and so must all histories seem which are bound, as all such histories are, to leave out of account all the deeper mysteries both of the body and of the soul. Phil Nelson did, nevertheless, believe in a great many things. He believed, among others, in the conquest of nature by man, and of man by himself; and he believed in himself, and in work and duty as being one and the same thing. And he believed in all these things still. But it had become a petrified creed, out of which the fire had burned and the heart had gone.

He made a point of being out before Ronaine was up or down, as he was shy of meeting a medical eye that would not fail to observe any signs of injustice towards breakfast, and to set them down to nearly the right cause. It was too early for him to see his employer, so he strolled, as slowly as he could, towards what his brother Dick used to call 'my place in the City'—that is to say, the office in which Mr. Richard Nelson occupied

a stool for so long as it might please an exceptionally long-suffering, good-natured, or eccentric principal to put up with his vagaries. Dick was as true a Nelson as Phil was a false one; and yet there had always been the sort of sympathy between Dick and Phil that is sometimes observed between a monkey and a bear. And, more by luck than good management, he met Dick himself just setting out on some errand that probably required special delay.

‘Ah—I heard from the governor you’d turned up last night,’ said the younger brother, who had lately been at some pains to acquire the proper nonchalance of high breeding. ‘I’m in no hurry—never am. Come and have a drink—by Jove! the more one drinks in the small hours, the drier one is in the long.’

‘That’s not business, Dick. But I’ll go your way. Did you write to me more than once while I was away?’

‘No. You see writing letters——’

‘Is a bore; I know. But I thought I must have lost a letter when I came back, and found you all in a new house, and—what does it all mean?’

‘Ah, indeed! Between you and me and the post, it’s my belief the governor got the

right tip about Pocahontas, and was mean enough to keep it from his own son. Jack thinks he's been robbing Mark & Simple's cash-box, and Duke that he's found out a family secret and is getting paid to hold his tongue. My belief is that the governor's a precious sharp old blade and a regular deep old file. But it's no use your looking after any of the sawdust, Phil. I wish there were; I'd cry halves. Yes, Phil; there's no more doubt that the governor's turned up some sort of trumps than that I haven't; such cards as I held last night you never saw. If I can't spot another Pocahontas, I shall have to make free with the cash-box too. I've half a mind to go on the Stock Exchange.'

'And Phœbe is—gone.'

'Ah, poor girl! But she always was rum. You take the advice of a fellow who knows women pretty well, and never trust one farther than you can see her with both eyes. I never do. When I say she's rum, I don't mean for taking a leap in the dark—that's their way; but it's for taking up with such a caterwauling, tallow-faced skunk as that fellow over the garden wall. But there's one comfort—you punched his head pretty well for him.'

‘So you believe Stanislas Adrianski to be the——’

‘Rather—not being green. The governor knows it too, but he won’t speak of it ; it puts him in a rage. He came home one evening and found her flown ; and by the same token, off goes Don Tallow-face too. I needn’t say he forgot to pay his weekly bills—poor Mother Dunn, where he lodged, has never smiled again, and spent her last sixpence on a grindstone for her nails. If I were Phœbe, I wouldn’t like to come across Mother Dunn. I don’t think Phœbe took anything. But there wasn’t anything worth taking in those days. Ah, Phil, there’s only two sexes—men and fools. There was my new meerschaum—and she went off with nothing but her bonnet and shawl.’

‘And you dare to tell me,’ said Phil, ‘that you all let her—who had been our sister—go off without putting out a finger across her road? Poor girl—there is not a soul to care for her ; not one!’

‘Ah, Phil, you don’t get knowledge of the world from books, my boy. I’m a man of the world. You may stop a woman from doing the right thing with a wink—I’ve done it my-

self, fifty times—but you may as well try to stop the Flying Dutchman with your own skull as to keep a woman from going to the devil if she's got the ghost of a mind to go. They all do it, you know. She's only one more. Well, old fellow, since you won't let me stand you a drink, p'r'aps you can lend me five pounds? By Jove! if you'd been with me last night, you'd know why. The luck was something——'

'You want me to help you from going to the devil—you, a man who would not lift a finger to save a girl?'

'Ah—but then I'm not a girl,' said Dick. 'If I had been I wouldn't have asked you for five pounds. I'd have asked you for ten. Bless your heart, Phil, I know them, through and through. The best of them isn't worth lifting a finger for. But when the luck's like last night's——'

And that was all the information for which Philip Nelson threw away five pounds. But it was more than enough—it was clear that Phœbe's flight with this foreign scamp had been at least notorious enough to become the gossip of the neighbours. To go there and gather up the current tales would only be to

learn how the foulest truth can be made yet more foul by lies. There was nothing left for the hour but to follow the road marked out for him, and to trust that the eager eyes of an aching heart might discover some by-path which should lead into the heart of the maze.

But I cannot tell — perhaps I cannot dream—what the struggle means between a heart that has ceased to live with life, and a brain that clenches itself and will not die—nay, will not even groan, lest it should be ashamed.

‘God bless you, my boy—and don’t forget Zenobia,’ was Ronaine’s parting blessing; and then, as ungratefully glad to be free of his friend as he could feel glad of anything, he set off for the station whence he was to reach the scene of his new work after a few hours’ journey. Those few hours of escape enabled him to attempt some sort of a plan, but every effort ended in failure. He knew that he might spend every spare moment in searching London, and every penny he earned in making inquiries elsewhere, with as much hope of discovering Phœbe or her lover as if he were to sit down with folded hands. Perhaps—and thought could bring him no nearer than this

—he might, when an old man, hear by chance some account of how she had come to die in a workhouse, or in the streets, or in a gaol ; that was always the last picture he could form. He had heard, or read, some story of how some prosperous, self-made man was accosted in the street by some wretched beggar woman, and, chancing to look at her face, recognised the remains of features he had loved in youth, and had never forgotten—and the memory came upon him with a ghastly horror. It was not even a relief when he reached the little way-side station whither he was bound. He could not put the picture out of his eyes, and it was always Phœbe's eyes that he saw.

It was not a station where chance passengers were common, but there was an inn close by where he easily found a fly for himself and his portmanteau. His experiences of the drive were no better than those of the railway. In this out-of-the-way part of England, which was altogether new to him, he felt himself being carried farther and farther from even such poor possibilities of helping Phœbe as the most incredible chains of chance might afford. The dull, flat

country through which he drove was as much an image of his future life as the flare and fever of great cities was henceforth of hers. It began to be like a nightmare—the thought that she might be within the bounds of the same small island, and yet farther off and more lost than when he had been dying in a distant land. And all the while Nature, so far from sympathising with his mood, and putting on for him her harshest winds and most leaden skies, was alive with a bright, sharp winter laugh, opening out a clear blue sky, and stinging no more than a healthy skin likes to be stung. Things would no doubt have been more fitting had Phil been one of Phœbe's heroes. A woman—and what is Nature else?—cannot be expected to waste her sympathetic scowls upon fellows who have so little *amour propre* as not even to take a pride in their own misery; who do not even whisper: 'This all comes of her not having chosen me.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT IS A RUPEE?

‘No; nothing can go very wrong at an English country house,’ thought Doyle, as he watched the disappearance of the train which carried away his troublesome daughter. ‘I have done right by the girl. Whatever nonsense she learns there, they won’t teach her that a dirty foreign fiddler who writes threatening letters is an eligible *parti*; their slang is bad enough, but it’s better than—well, than hers. Better have her a fine lady than let her make a fool of herself in her own way. And yet—I’m glad she spoke up for the fellow, cad and sneak as he must be. I wish she’d been a boy—I should have known what to do with him. But a daughter—you may teach her and train her, and think you know every thought in her head and every feeling in her heart; and then, all at once, you find out that, not only has she a secret, but that her very

nature is the opposite pole of what you fancied ; that your training has been but a shower on a duck's back ; that so far from knowing every thought, you have never known one. I wonder if it's really true that women have souls ; or whether they've only got empty places stuffed up with the stray scraps of other people's, which they can't even digest properly. Going wrong for want of amusement, indeed ! Well, I suppose Mrs. Hassock knows her own sex ; and a fine sex it must be, that can't keep straight unless it's treated like a child. And I, too, saddle myself with a daughter, ready made, not even my own, whose nature I couldn't even fancy I knew ! I wonder what insanity could have made me dream of doing such a thing. Well — I'm a free man again for a little while, without so much as Mrs. Hassock to bother me. I can live my own life again, and do as I please, without having to spend morning, noon, and evening in trying to fathom that girl — and trying in vain.'

So he thought, out of the depths of the profoundest inexperience ; and so, by way of a relief from the worries of the last few days, he welcomed liberty once more, and his return

for awhile to the solitude which, till his rash adoption of Phœbe, had become the law of his being. He did not even go home to dine, but, out of a sense of duty to a holiday of recovered freedom, went off to Richmond, and feasted—all alone. He had no more than the healthy masculine turn for gourmandism, and certainly no preference for Richmond in winter over Harland Terrace, where he had his comforts round him; but it seemed the right and natural thing for a man whose womankind had given him a holiday. It was the sense of irresponsible liberty that he had planned to enjoy. But so far from enjoying it, he was bound to confess that his first day of freedom turned out a failure; and when, after a cold and dismal journey back, he reached the house which was now his own as much as solitude could make it, he felt, for the first time in his life, alone.

And, when he came down to breakfast next morning at the usual hour, he had to own that he missed, most unreasonably missed, the girl who had become nothing but an unprofitable trouble to him, and from whom he had parted yesterday, as he had supposed, so gladly. It annoyed him to realise that it

would have been a sort of pleasure, something more than a comfort, to see her in her usual place behind the urn. What was there for him to miss in Phœbe? Not a pretty face to look at, because at breakfast-time he looked at little but the morning paper, and because a much prettier face would have been at least equally disregarded. Certainly not her conversation, because, in his company, want of conversation was one of the most pronounced characteristics of Phœbe. Not her brightness, for he had never found her bright; not her good-humour, because for the last week she had been playing an openly sullen part. It was her mere personal presence that he missed somehow, and for want of which the house felt cold and empty. He could never have dreamed of the possibility of such a thing. Had she been the simple-natured and pleasant companion, the approach to a real daughter that he had once dreamed of making her, it would have been a different affair. But she had from the outset been a disappointment, and had of late been a fountain of daily anxiety and hourly trouble—and yet, had she been an angel he could not have missed her more. The discovery troubled him. He

could not help glancing now and then over the edge of his newspaper at her empty place, and once he passed his empty cup towards where her absence was, to be filled. He certainly lighted his cheroot at the breakfast-table—a luxury which he had given up out of respect for the atmosphere of a lady's parlour—but he withdrew after the second whiff to his own den. He had missed even her common 'good-morning.' For the second time in his life he felt alone ; and it was not because he was by himself—that was a matter of course—but because Phœbe was away for one day out of a life which had done perfectly well without her for something like half a century. It seemed incredible that such a girl should have stamped even a day of a man's life with the seal which is supposed to belong only to exceptionally strong natures, whose faults are missed more, and charm more, than the graces and virtues of weaker people are and can. 'This won't do,' thought Doyle. 'I mustn't bother my head too much about the girl. I've done the best I can for her, and it's for her sake I put up with her and her vagaries—certainly not for my own.' So he went out into the streets, which had no associations with Phœbe,

at least so far as he was concerned. But he did not go again to Richmond. He spent his evening at home, and felt that the house without Phœbe—dull, sullen, disappointing, perverse, altogether troublesome as she was—was an empty shell. And houses, as all the world knows, are but reflections of the lives that are lived in them.

‘I must do something or other before bedtime,’ thought he. ‘Let me see—I’ll write to Phœbe. I ought to tell her to enjoy herself and not hurry home. That would never do, with a fellow like that hanging round the street corners. I ought to tell her that—that—I don’t miss her at all.’

It is a pity that the condition of John Doyle’s mind could not have been photographed, and sent by post to Sir Charles Bassett, of Cautleigh Hall. For through and round the Hall, in the eyes of its owner, was stalking the ghost of Rayner Bassett; the ghost not of a dead, but of a living man. His interview with Doyle had been very much the reverse of a relief to his mind. He had not failed to note how completely the latter had changed, in look, in bearing, in all essen-

tial things, from the Jack of ancient Bohemia ; how he had assumed the dignified gentleman, as a prudent man will who intends presently to bid for county sympathies. There had been none of the genial readiness on Doyle's part due to the recognition of an old friend and comrade after a parting of many years and more especially when there was no lack of such readiness on the other side. He had held off his old friend like an enemy, for no overt cause ; yet, after refusing that friend a sight of his daughter, after refusing every offer of hospitality, he had, under the influence of some violently inconsistent afterthought, sent his daughter, alone, to Cautleigh Hall. *Why?* And to what did such things point and lead ?

The points of the case, as they shaped themselves in Sir Charles Bassett's anxious, acute, and sensitively diplomatic mind were clearly these :

Rayner Bassett, notoriously a scamp, had gone under water to avoid transportation ; that is to say, he had every imaginable reason for changing his name.

On the tested authority of the parish register of Helmforth, one John Doyle had, at a

certain date, been married there to one Mary Cox, spinster.

The true name of this John Doyle who, on that date, married Mary Cox, spinster, at Helmforth, was Rayner Bassett. And Rayner Bassett is by no means a common name—still less a name that two bearers of it would, at the same time, have reason to change. And, on the same alarmingly good evidence, one daughter was born to Mary Cox and Rayner Bassett, otherwise John Doyle.

Then the cloud had gone over Rayner Bassett for good (as everybody held it) and all. But, at a completely consistent period, there emerged from a cloud, though still living under one, a John Doyle, of unknown origin, but as notorious a black sheep as Rayner Bassett had been, with this difference—that the scamp had, by the natural law of development, become emphasised into blackguard. And yet into a blackguard with such relics of the educated gentleman as a man of gentle origin would inevitably retain.

Then John Doyle, or Rayner Bassett, also had disappeared—this time not in Bohemia, but in India. And, as he had absolutely no expectation of becoming heir to the title and

estates, and was absolutely cut off from his family, it was unlikely that he should, save by the merest accident, come to learn that they had fallen into the hands of one who had less right to them than he.

But—though still with a more than doubtful repute—he had come home. And even as John Doyle, otherwise Rayner Bassett, was the father of one daughter, even so one daughter had come home from India with Rayner Bassett, otherwise John Doyle.

So much for the facts ; and a sufficiently ugly story they made. But why did he not at once declare himself, and assert his unquestionable claim to his title and his land, and to all the arrears of income during his nephew's wrongful possession ?

There could be only one possible reason—that his case was at present an imperfect one, from a legal point of view. And though Sir Charles Bassett was, of course, unable to guess the precise nature of its imperfection, it was easy enough to make a list that would include the weak point, whatever it might be. It might be some difficulty in proving his identity with Rayner Bassett in such a way as to avoid bringing to light his marriage under a

false name, or his reasons for assuming the name of Doyle. Or it might be that he was waiting to assure himself that time had effectually disposed of evidence which might make his claim end in a conviction for forgery. Or he might as yet be uncertain whether his nephew might not, after all, have taken the land under some settlement or will. Or he might be in a state of indecision, on other grounds besides these, whether his position was strong enough for a complete claim, or only for a compromise. Or, finally, it might be that his whole case had as yet taken no definite form—that he was nothing more than suspicious of his nephew's wrongful possession, and had everything to learn, in the hope that he might obtain everything; in the certainty of a blackguard that, though entitled to nothing, he might be bribed to keep the existence of such a Bassett a secret from the world. In any one of these cases there was ample reason for his sending a spy into the enemy's camp, in the person of his daughter, whether she were an accomplice or merely a more or less innocent tool. She would learn how far Rayner Bassett's forgery continued to be a local tradition, and if any evidence thereof

remained. She would learn without trouble whether Sir Charles held under a will or as heir-at-law. She would learn the characters of the people with whom her father would have to deal. If merely her father's tool, she would drink evidence in with the air of Cautleigh; if his intelligent accomplice, she would find the place a teeming mine, while her position as an invited guest would place her presence beyond suspicion. Why else had she been sent there? Her very coming was a moral confirmation of all.

‘And so he has fallen into his own pit,’ thought Sir Charles. ‘No—I won’t bolster up his case by the addition of a single feather. This is a matter of justice, not of law. Not all the lawyers on earth shall persuade me that Sir Ralph Bassett should be robbed of his lands by a blackguard and a forger, who happens to have a base legal right on his side. When law works injustice its reason fails. Let him try his worst, and let her come. If it’s to be a war of wits, I’m neither too old nor too young to be a match for a girl.’

So, from the moment of her arrival, he watched Phœbe closely, under the flattering pretence of paying exceptional attention and

honour to the daughter of a dear and long-lost old friend. At first he found her shy—silent among women, monosyllabic with men, and evidently unused to the manners and customs of any sort of society. ‘She’s nothing more than a tool,’ thought he after the first day. ‘Her letters home may be just what I please.’ But presently he became aware that, if wholly innocent of her mission, her innocence was likely to prove more useful to her father than any amount of cunning. At the end of three days her host’s sharpest eye could not find a sign or slip in her to show that she had not lived, ever since she was born, in the circle to which she had been an utter stranger three days ago. ‘That girl’s a born actress, if ever there was one,’ thought he at the end of the fourth day, with rather less confidence than before in the extent of the superiority of his wits to hers. ‘And she has a quick study—I wonder what her *rôle* has been before that of county lady? But don’t overdo your part; you show more tact than is natural, mademoiselle. Girls who have lived out of the world till your age don’t learn all its tricks in the twinkling of an eye.’

So he watched Phœbe Doyle more closely

still. But, though he watched patiently as well as keenly and minutely, he went unrewarded until, one day, the Mrs. Urquhart whom Sir Charles had proposed for Phœbe's chaperon during her journey down happened to ask :

‘Sir Charles, what is a rupee? Exactly, I mean.’

‘I’m ashamed to say that I don’t know,’ said he. ‘But Miss Doyle will know. Miss Doyle, what is a rupee?’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure,’ said she. ‘But it seems to sound something like the name of a flower.’

‘I fancied it was money,’ said Mrs. Urquhart, without seeming surprised at Phœbe’s answer. But Sir Charles, though he changed the topic at once, had made one discovery—that Miss Doyle’s knowledge of India was not above the level of Mrs. Urquhart’s own. From that moment he made a point of never mentioning India in her hearing again. No cross-examination was needed to convince him that a woman who has never heard of rupees is as likely to have lived in India for a single hour as in the moon for a hundred years.

But this was nothing to the discovery that he made after a few days more.

He was walking alone through the park one afternoon, not along the avenue between the house and the lodge gates, but along a branch path towards a distant postern, when he saw Stanislas, Ralph's new foreign valet, come out of a copse and proceed along the path some distance in front of him. Of course there was nothing in this, because Stanislas might very well have some errand for his master. But on reaching a point in the path from which the house was not visible, he saw the valet stop ; and then, from a clump of trees on the other side, came a girl for whom Stanislas had evidently been waiting. Sir Charles could not doubt his own eyes. And his eyes told him that the girl was Phœbe Doyle.

Had the encounter been accidental, the lady guest would have received the manservant's salutation and passed on. But she did nothing of the kind. Sir Charles, stepping behind a transparent bush, saw no salutation on the valet's side, while Phœbe stopped and entered into earnest conversation. It was as clearly a rendezvous as anything

could be. Sir Charles felt no compunction whatever about secretly witnessing a conversation of which he could not, fortunately or unfortunately, hear a word. On the contrary, he would, as the minister of right and justice, have willingly at the moment have become deaf with one ear on condition that he might hear at an unnatural distance with the other. Of course it was no common, or rather uncommon, intrigue between a lady, or one who passed for such, with a serving-man. He thought he knew Phœbe at least well enough to acquit her of anything of that kind. But that she had not met the fellow accidentally or without ample cause was clear. The conversation was long, and was remarkably animated on the valet's side. She, with her back towards Sir Charles, spoke earnestly. He, with his face in full view, clasped his hands, waved them, and laid them on his chest, and went through various other feats of pantomime. Finally she handed him what looked like a letter. And then they parted—Phœbe towards the house, Stanislas towards the postern. Sir Charles kept his hiding-place till she had passed him, and then, when she was out of sight, returned to the house by another way.

This did not look like the innocence of an unconscious tool—this looked like plotting, in some half-intelligible way. Was Phœbe writing letters which she feared to entrust to the post-bag lest her host should stoop—he, a Bassett and a gentleman!—to overhaul what his guests wrote to their families and friends? Was she, the spy-in-chief, employing the servants of the house as under-spies? What should she discover that required all this mystery? It ought to be something of dangerous importance indeed. He went into the library and sent for Ralph.

‘Ralph,’ said he, ‘I want to know where you picked up that foreign fellow of yours. I’ve been always meaning to ask you, and always forgetting. It came into my head just now, and so I sent for you for fear it should go out again.’

‘You mean Stanislas? Oh, I wanted a man of that sort—one that I can take abroad, without having to look after him. I don’t care to have an Englishman. They’re no use except to open doors and let in the people one doesn’t want to see. Stanislas seems a first-rate sort of a fellow—he’s a Pole, but he knows French better than I do, and has been

all over Europe, and seems able to turn his hand to most things. He was in the orchestra at a theatre before he came to me.'

'At a theatre—eh? And why isn't he at a theatre now?'

'He got thrown out of his engagement from the house closing, so he tells me.'

'And how did you hear of him?'

'Oh, from—from a theatrical friend of mine, who knew I wanted a sort of foreign valet, and happened to know that the man wanted a place of any kind.'

'I don't want to pry into your private affairs, you know, but was this theatrical friend of yours monsieur, or madame, or mademoiselle? There was an ominous pause after your first "from."'

'Mademoiselle. But a very good girl.'

'Of course. And she gave the man a character, I suppose. Honest—sober——'

'Oh, good enough——'

'That's all I wanted to know. You see I like to know, for the sake of the morals below stairs, who my household are. I'm quite content—a good enough man highly recommended by a very good girl. What do you think of Miss Doyle?'

‘Miss Doyle? Isn’t that for me to ask you?’

‘Why so?’

‘Because she seems a special favourite of yours. You’ve hardly given anybody else a chance of forming an opinion, you see.’

‘And you think it’s hardly fair for a man of my venerable antiquity to take notice of the prettiest girl within reach of his eyes? Yes—and the nicest girl, too, when you get to know her, and with plenty of nature, not spoiled by over-training. You see I like to know what I’ve got above stairs, as well as below. I never came across a girl of her age who was so little of a bore; she neither sings, nor plays, nor reads, nor writes, nor talks about the people who do—if she only knew how to ride, she’d be within an inch of perfection. And I believe she could learn to ride in an hour. A man might make her anything he pleased. . . . Now don’t look at me as if I were going to give you a stepmother. In the first place she wouldn’t have me; and, in the second place, I wouldn’t have her. I only hope you’ll give me a step-daughter half as worth having as Phœbe Doyle. There—I’ve let out my enthusiasm, which has been bottling

itself up ever since she has been here. I am in love with her, in a paternal way. I was in hope you'd have sung her praises; but, as you didn't, they had to be sung, all the same.'

'That's what they call hedging,' his reflections ran, as soon as he was alone again. 'Whatever she is, the girl isn't a fool; she wouldn't say no to Ralph; and if the worst came to the worst, the worst would turn out to be second best if Ralph were husband of the heiress and father of her children. He's soft enough about women to fall in love with any girl he's thrown with, and to fall out again if I see any reason to change my mind—as Heaven grant I may! Ah, my good uncle! if you lose, I win; if you win, you'll have to win for me and mine. I wouldn't have missed seeing what I've seen to-day for a thousand pounds. So this precious valet comes from a stage lady—eh? If that stage lady isn't my uncle's catspaw—— He seems to like working with women. And he's right, by Jove! So will I. Come in!'

'A gentleman, Sir Charles, to see you on business,' said the footman, bringing him a

card on which he read, 'Messrs. Crowe and Beevor, George Street, Westminster.'

'I will see him here,' said Sir Charles.

'I have come,' said the visitor, 'to inspect and report on some drainage works, about which you consulted us a little while ago.'

'Of course—I remember. But I'm afraid I must confess that since I had the pleasure of consulting you, the matter has rather gone out of mind. It is possible I may not determine to set about the affair—which will be a long and heavy one, as it means nothing less than the entire reclaiming of a large tract of waste land—for some time to come. Still, there is no harm in our knowing how the land lies—if it is practicable, and what ought to be tried. Are you Mr. Beevor or Mr. Crowe?'

'My name is Nelson,' said Philip. 'But I have their instructions——'

'I need not tell you, Mr. Nelson, that the man who is honoured with their confidence most implicitly has mine. I am very pleased to make your acquaintance indeed. I hope you are in no very pressing hurry to return.'

'I am entirely at your service, Sir

Charles. I have no other engagement at present——'

'All the better; for I have—a great many. It is too late and too dark to do anything to-day; and to-morrow—but we leave to-morrows very much to themselves here. Meanwhile, till I can drive you over to the Holms, you will, I hope, be my guest. But of course you will—there is no other place for you to stay at.'

Philip was unwilling enough to accept, but he could hardly refuse; and the baronet's easy courtesy attracted him no less than his own bearing had, by force of contrast, pleased Sir Charles. He did not know that he had entered a house full of uncongenial guests with uncongenial ways, or he would certainly have invented some excuse for putting up at the village tavern. But as it was, and as a matter of business, he let himself be led to a rather out-of-the-way bachelor's bedroom, have his battered valise unpacked, and be left by the man who had been told off for this duty with the information that he had a good hour before dinner.

It need not be said that Philip Nelson had never found himself a visitor in a great house

before, and that he was entirely without the tact which should have saved him from being a good deal at sea in his new quarters. But his was neither the character, and infinitely less was his the present mood, to care a straw whether what he did or how he looked was the right thing or the wrong. If it were his fate to be set down by his host for a boor, what then? He did not pretend to be a gentleman; he only aimed at being an engineer, and took a certain sort of pride in not mixing the two things. So, when the last gong proclaimed that dinner was being served, he found his way into the drawing-room, absolutely indifferent to the fact that he did not even possess a suit of dress clothes.

But he was not indifferent to the discovery that he suddenly found himself among a number of very fine people in a brilliantly lighted room, all talking and laughing together, and yet not too much occupied with one another to have no eyes for him. The plain engineer, who flattered himself that he looked down from his rude height upon gentlemen and ladies, was ashamed of himself for feeling shy.

But his host came forward, and shook

hands with his most recent guest before them all. 'Welcome to Cautleigh Hall, Mr. Nelson,' said he. 'I won't keep dinner waiting while I introduce you to everybody all round—you will know us all, by nature, in an hour. But I must introduce you to the lady whom you will take down. Mr. Nelson—Miss Doyle.'

CHAPTER XIII

NO

MR. NELSON—Miss Doyle !

Should I be to blame for throwing down a pen which refuses to put a seeming eternity of hopeless, speechless, chaotic amazement into a single word ? It was absolutely impossible, even as an incident in a dream, that Miss Doyle, a guest at Cautleigh Hall, should be poor Phœbe Burden, who had been a sort of maid-of-all-work to a lawyer's clerk, and had run away with a fiddler. Nothing could be so impossible. And yet could there be two Phœbes in Phil Nelson's eyes ? That would be to the impossible what the impossible itself is to common things.

Yet that Phœbe Burden should, under any conceivable conditions, and in a period of time to be measured by months only, have developed into this fine Miss Doyle—— Could it be wondered that even a lover

should mistrust his own sight? That a healthy man should doubt if he were not a fever-patient in the heart of Russian steppes once more? 'Phœbe!' had sprung to his lips when his eyes met hers. She was flushed, and her eyes were bright; but they were also as silent as her tongue. The name died upon his lips, and he gave her his arm.

There was a chance for him to say in a low voice, on the way downstairs: 'Phœbe, I have found you; I know you; whatever this means, fear nothing; I am your friend.' But suppose his brain were really fevered by these last anxious days, and that he were exaggerating a mere accidental resemblance into an incredible identity? He had learned what delirium means, and what it can do; nor had his latest experiences been of a kind to keep it away. Surely the real Phœbe could not have treated her foster-brother as a stranger—would somehow have contrived to answer him, if only with her eyes. And if he were mad, if this Miss Doyle were in truth not Phœbe, he had at least the common presence of mind, of which not even madmen are devoid, not to pose as a madman before her and before them all. He did not look into

her face, but he felt the light touch of her hand upon his arm. Could Phœbe's hand have lain there so quiet and so calm?

He certainly did not think or care if some strange Miss Doyle might be thinking the roughly-dressed guest to whom it had been her misfortune to fall an exceeding stupid cavalier. If this girl were Phœbe, she was still everything to him; if not, then she was less than nothing. Presently he was seated at the table between her and a middle-aged lady whom he did not observe. He could not speak to Phœbe, if it were she. How could he, for the sake of testing her by her voice, say any common nothing to her, whom he had thought lost in one impossible way and had found in another? And he had nothing to say to a Miss Doyle.

Sitting under new conditions at the table of a strange house, among strangers, and beside one whom he had till an instant ago believed lost worse than hopelessly, or else one who resembled her more closely than twin sisters in a comedy, it is no wonder that he lost certain belief in the trustworthiness of his very senses in this dream-like maze. So absorbed was he in the presence of his neigh-

bour that he ate and drank very much like the rest, simply because he had no observation to spare for heeding whether he ate and drank or no, or even whether anything was placed before him. Of the surrounding talk he did not catch a word. His ears were waiting for some word from his neighbour that might be drawn from her by other speech than his own.

‘My father has been bringing a terrible accusation against you,’ at last said the young man of about Phil’s own age, or younger, who sat on Miss Doyle’s other side. No doubt he had been courteously waiting to give the stranger his chance, and, having thrown his courtesy away, felt called to save the girl herself from being wasted on so dismally stupid a companion. ‘He says you don’t ride.’

Phil waited anxiously for the sound of her answer, and—

‘No,’ said she, in so low a tone that it might have been any girl’s. Her accent was certainly not more distinctively Phœbe’s than her eyes.

‘I thought all ladies rode in India before sunrise, or in the middle of the night, or up

the hills, or whatever the cool times and places are. I've been turning it over in my mind, I can assure you, most anxiously, and you must ride.'

Phil waited in vain this time for even so much as a 'No.'

'There's only one reason that makes me doubt, or I should say that did make me doubt, whether riding would be altogether good for you, and I'm bound to say it's a selfish one. Can you guess?'

'No.'

'I detest perfection. Nobody does like his own likeness, you know, and my father says that all you want of absolute perfection is to be able to take a bullfinch flying. You can get somebody to help you to a habit, and I'll have out Mab to-morrow. She can't take a bullfinch, but she's warranted not to spill—as steady as one of your own elephants, Miss Doyle. You're just about the weight for Mab, and she's just the pace and style for a beginner. I'll see you through your paces myself.'

'Do you hunt?' suddenly asked the elderly lady on Phil's right, turning upon him rather sharply, and preventing him hearing

whether Miss Doyle's 'Yes' might be more to the purpose than her 'No.'

'No,' said he, in his turn, and rather like a bear. But there were limits set by certain instincts of his to even his worst manners. 'No, I have never hunted,' he said, if still something like a bear, yet more like one who has been tamed and trained. 'I am no sportsman, and have no fellow-feeling with those who are.'

'Then I would not advise you to speak quite so loud,' said she. 'Privately, I agree with you. We are not country people, you know. Mr. Urquhart does not hunt, nor do I. He is a very old friend of Sir Charles. Did you know poor Lady Bassett? She was a charming person. She was a very dear friend of mine. You have come for these theatricals, I suppose. I don't act myself, and so, of course, I'm no judge of such things. Mr. Ralph Bassett is a very good actor, they say; I've never seen him myself, so, of course——'

'Don't make me blush, Mrs. Urquhart,' said Miss Doyle's talking neighbour, catching at the chance of making the talk in that particular part of the table more general.

‘I don’t know what you said, but I heard my name, so I know it was praise. I’m afraid I shouldn’t be able to count on Urquhart himself so well. By Jove! when I think of the number of times I’ve not been in his chambers, I wonder whether he’d know me if he saw me. The last time I met myself there, I declare—— Did you ever feel as if you were somebody else, Miss Doyle?’

‘No.’

And so the long dinner dragged out for Phil—a mere waste of barren chatter from which he could gather nothing, except that Miss Doyle was either singularly silent by nature or else intentionally dumb. But at last the ladies withdrew, and Phil found himself thrown next to the young man who had done all the talking for three.

‘I must introduce myself, Mr. Nelson,’ said he pleasantly. ‘I am Sir Charles Bassett’s son. I hear you’ve come down about reclaiming Cautleigh Holms. It’s a big idea; I didn’t know till you came that my father had carried it so far. I’m glad you’ve come down now, for my own sake, because I’m at home, and for yours because we’re a rather livelier house than we always are. I suppose

you won't want to be up to your waist in the Holms all day long. Do you hunt? I can always give you a mount.'

'Thank you,' said Phil, with a touch of the pride which working bees fancy, in their conceit, that they have a right to assume towards the butterflies who may really be their betters, if the whole truth were known; 'but I expect that my work here will leave no time for play.'

'I thought,' said Ralph, too good-humouredly to be suspected of aiming at an amply deserved repartee, 'that all work and no play was the business of the machines, not of the men who make them. No, your doctrine won't hold water; it's not a bit like Cautleigh Holms. Look at Urquhart, the husband of that lady who sat next you; he married money, and he's made money, and she half starves him to keep what they've got, and he grinds himself into Scotch snuff to make another bawbee. Which is the wisest, the man who puts off work till it's too late to work, or the man who puts off enjoying till it's too late to enjoy? It seems to me that the fool's cap made for one will fit the other just as well.'

That was not what Phil's gospel had be-

come, whatever it might have been had he been born heir to Cautleigh, and had found no cause to vow the sacrifice of his soul upon the altar of heartless labour. But here, at least, a chance had been given him that was not to be thrown away. So he forced himself to ask, and thought he put the question as lightly as if it had sincerely meant nothing but natural curiosity :

‘ Which was Mrs. Urquhart—the lady on my right or on my left, I mean ? ’

‘ Well, I should rather say decidedly not the lady on your left. That was Miss Doyle.’

‘ Miss Doyle ? ’

‘ Yes, and though she’s been staying here some time now, I never found out till to-day that she was so good a talker. Till I sat next her just now, I had always fancied her a trifle slow, and heavy to lift. But I suppose to a girl who has been a close prisoner in India all her life, England must still seem rather strange.’

‘ Miss Doyle—and she has lived in India ? Who is Miss Doyle ? ’ asked Phil, bewildered more than ever.

‘ You have been in India, then ? ’ said Ralph, supposing that the name might easily be familiar to the ears of a presumably travelled

engineer. 'In that case you very likely know more about the Doyles than I. Old Doyle is in some sort of financial business in Calcutta, I believe, who knew my father before he went out, and has lately come back to England, bringing his daughter with him. They're rich people, I believe.'

'And this Miss Doyle has lived in India, you say, always—ever since she was a child?'

'It isn't usual. But she has—for aught I know she was born there. Anyhow, she must have gone out too young to remember England, for she knows nobody, and has been nowhere except to London and here. But it certainly doesn't look as if India was so bad a nursery as they say. Do you know old Doyle?'

'No. Is he—Miss Doyle's father—here?'

'No, he didn't come down. I have a sort of notion that he's a bit of a bear—a sort of heavy comedy father, you know. After the way he used to keep her shut up in India, I was rather surprised at his letting her come down alone. But she's got a maid like an elderly marchioness, who looks quite capable of acting duenna to old Doyle's heavy father. You must excuse my stage slang; when the frost set in, somebody or other was prompted

by some mischievous imp to put us upon getting up a play, and now that the weather has broken, we're too much bit to send the imp packing. Do you act? I'll make you a present of my part, and welcome, if you do.'

'I don't act. Does Miss Doyle?'

This time Phil's indifference was a piece of affectation too obvious to pass unnoticed by the dullest and most masculine eyes. Ralph was much too good-natured to see the making of a possible butt in the ill-dressed and not too-well-mannered guest who was anything but one of themselves, and seemed unable to help talking about a girl to whom he had been unable to say a word. These things made up all the more reason for being especially civil to so exceptional a stranger.

'No,' said he, 'Miss Doyle is a girl in a thousand; she doesn't sing, she doesn't play harp, fiddle, or piano; she doesn't write, she doesn't read, she doesn't even ride, she doesn't flirt—much—and she's never even seen as many as two plays. I'm glad she doesn't act. It would take off the edge of her superiority to common girls, who all seem crazed to do something badly because professionals do it well. Miss Doyle shall ride, but she sha'n't

play. That was our leading lady opposite you—Lady Mildred Vincent; she into whose ear the imp whispered. I'm her lover—on the stage. If you stay to the first night and the last, you'll see something, though I say it that shouldn't, nearly half as good as a rehearsal at the very worst theatre in London. But I see we're going to join the ladies. Will you do the same at once, or will you smoke first? No? Very well then, nor will I. But let me first introduce you to my friend Lawrence. Lawrence, let me introduce you to Mr. Nelson, who has come down, like St. Patrick, to drive the frogs out of Cautleigh Holms. And I say, Lawrence,' he said when Phil, after just accepting the introduction, had followed his host from the dining-room, 'you've got another duel on your hands. Our young friend Miss Phœbe is coming out in the light of the new Helen. First, you go down before her, at the first flutter of her fan. Then my father becomes her shadow, and only to-day confessed to me, in terms of passionate admiration, that he is not going to make her my stepmother—fortunate girl! And now a stray engineer can't sit by her side without being struck speechless in her presence, and unable to talk

about anything else as soon as her light was gone. By Jove! it's the funniest thing going, better than fifty plays.'

'And how about yourself? It strikes me that if talking about the fair Phœbe is a symptom, you've been in a baddish way yourself this last half-hour.'

'Oh, me? I'm going to cut out the lot of you. I'm going to have out Mab, and teach her to ride. It's odd for a girl who's been brought up in India not to be able to ride.'

'Yes, Bassett. Odd's the word. There's something odd altogether about that Indian life of hers. Everybody knew all about Jack Doyle, the archdeacon, but who ever heard of Jack Doyle's daughter? And she's as shy of talking about India as if it were—Whitechapel. I never mention it to her now. You know, though he's your father's acquaintance and all that, the archdeacon had not a good name out there, as I warned you at starting. Yes, old fellow, I've a shrewd sort of a guess that either the fair Phœbe's mother was some low caste native, for all her fair skin—nature plays queerer tricks than that—or else that, for some other reason, the gorgeous East and Miss Phœbe Doyle didn't agree. I tried to get her to let

me tell her fortune by the lines in her hands, so that I might have a look at the roots of her nails. But she was up to me, and turned as close-fisted as—her father. She knows a trick or two, that girl.'

'What infernal nonsense! She's as good a girl as ever was born. Of course, she doesn't want to talk shop about howdahs, and tiffin, and brandy pawnee. She must be sick of India, considering the way she must have lived there. And as for her nails——'

'Holloa, Bassett, who's victim number four, if you please? Don't do that, my dear boy; don't, whatever you do.'

'Don't do what?'

'Don't teach Phœbe Doyle to ride, that's all.'

'Don't teach your great-grandmother, Lawrence, and that's all. Will you weed? Then so will I.'

Meanwhile Philip Nelson had sought and found an obscure position in the drawing-room, whence he could observe her whom he had been insane enough to mistake for Phœbe, with the help of the knowledge that she was in reality a Miss Doyle from India. There could be no

sort of reasonable doubt about that any more. He had been told by the son of his host that she was a Miss Doyle, the daughter of a rich Anglo-Indian, and that, in consequence, his discovery of the supposed daughter of a copying-clerk in the person of a rich baronet's honoured guest had been something more than absurd—as absurd, to say the least of it, as if he had mistaken the man who had handed him his soup for an earl in disguise.

And yet, as she sat there on a sofa near the fire, receiving the conversation of Sir Charles himself, every trick and turn of her face seemed to identify her more and more with Phœbe. It is true he had never seen Phœbe, the real Phœbe, dressed like a fine lady, but his recollection of her face was very far from being dependent on the accident of clothes. Had he been a painter, he could have made her portrait from memory, and it would have been the exact likeness of Miss Doyle. He was not versed enough in romantic precedent to leap to the conclusion that Miss Doyle must have had a twin-sister who had been stolen in infancy; and, even so, a sister lost in London would not have grown up to be the exact counterpart of one brought up in India. Had

he been in a court of justice, Urquhart himself could not have confused his oath that this was Phoebe Burden. And yet, beyond question, she was not Phoebe Burden, and was Miss Doyle.

Music, talk, and a remote whist-table were occupying the rest of the party, but it was all as unheeded by him as the dinner had been. Presently, however, Sir Charles left Miss Doyle's side, and joined the guest who appeared to be so awkwardly alone in a crowd. It was from his father that Ralph had learned his instincts of courtesy.

'You must give me a holiday to-morrow, Mr. Nelson,' said his host. 'I was not prepared for so early a visit, and I have engagements that can't possibly be postponed. The rule of this house is for everybody to do whatever he likes, and I hope you will follow the rule. Meanwhile—are you anything of a musician? Music seems to be the rule of the hour, and if you can do anything in that line, I can promise you any amount of public sympathy.'

'I am no musician,' said Phil, making an effort to bring his thoughts together. 'I'm not sure that I'm not unfashionable enough to

dislike music,' he added, for the sake of saying something, but thinking of a certain serenade.

'Then, Mr. Nelson, you are a hero—not for disliking music, but for daring to say so. I know many a brave man who would sooner go to the stake than own, in these days, that he thinks music a bore; and yet, in their hearts, all but some twenty people in England do; and eleven of those, in their secret souls, wish that it were lawful to like barrel-organs. You and Miss Doyle must have found yourselves kindred spirits. Why, where has she vanished to? I was going to say——'

'Miss Doyle is from India?' asked Phil rather abruptly. Now that the girl was no longer before his eyes, there was no unreasonable doubt to prevent his returning to his question, and adding: 'She has such an extraordinary likeness to somebody whom I know—and who she cannot be—that it was at first impossible for me to believe they were not the same.'

'Indeed? Perhaps you have been in India, and may have come across my friend Doyle there?' asked Sir Charles, interested in any chance that might give him a scrap of

knowledge. 'India is a large place, I know, but then the whole world is small.'

'No; I have never been in India, nor has the girl I mean.'

'Well, likenesses are sometimes startling. Miss Doyle has never been out of India till a few months—I don't know exactly how many—ago. And she is an only child, so it can't be a sister whom you have met anywhere. It's certainly odd, though, that there should be anybody exactly like Miss Doyle. She isn't of a common type, and her eyes are peculiarly her own. If you're not a musician, perhaps you're a whist-player? I see there is an opening for you to cut in.'

Sir Charles, having done his duty, let himself drift into another group.

Phil did not join the card-table; he had ample occupation in realising at last that Miss Doyle from India, in spite of the evidence of his eyes themselves, fortified by minute and indelible memory, could not possibly be Phœbe.

His brain must have been so full of the latter as to be deluded. Phœbe was as lost as ever, and he must not expect to find her in such impossible places, under such impossible conditions, as Cautleigh Hall.

He alone knew of Phœbe, but everybody seemed to know everything about Miss Doyle. Either he had been, or the whole world was, insane ; and it is not quite so impossible to decide such a dilemma against oneself as most people suppose.

CHAPTER XIV

BEHIND THE SCENES

It is not the easiest thing in the world, even in Liberty Hall itself, for a young lady guest and the son and heir's man-of-all-work to obtain confidential speech together. But a trained conspirator like Count Stanislas Adrianski is, or ought to be, equal to any occasion. It, moreover, belongs to his craft and calling—so, at least, we are told by people who say they know—to be profoundly versed in all the ins and outs of human nature, and to be able to tell by a straw which way the wind blows. So he could not fail to think that Phœbe would think it odd that a patriot hero, whose head, heart, hand, and sword were due in Poland, should, all of a sudden, turn up at a country house in the capacity of a young gentleman's valet. There are lands, it is true, where long-descended nobles—so long-descended as to have reached

the very bottom—are to be found in such bewildering profusion as to make it even betting that it is a count who blacks one's boots or cuts one's hair; and there are lands, too, where titled coal-merchants, stock-brokers, grocers, poulterers, and publicans are less uncommon than they were in the dark ages. But an Adrianski could not forsake the romantic fiddle for the servile clothes-brush without some better reason than need of monthly wages; an Adrianski could not desert his country at her need in order that Ralph Bassett should be properly groomed. Honour, and a hundred other things, forbade that Mademoiselle Doyle should be left, for one needless moment, to run to such base conclusions as these would be. Of course, no conspirator who is worth his salt thinks of betraying to a woman the true mainsprings of his actions—the secret history of the mysteries in which he is involved. The cause might doubtless require, for the present, to be served in a menial capacity. Causes are very often served in yet more illogical ways. The whole how and why were not for a woman's tell-tale ears; but—yes; in a general way she had a right to

know that even this apparent degradation was ennobled by being all for the cause.

So Phœbe had not been five minutes at Cautleigh Hall before she found, upon her toilette-table, an envelope addressed to her in the now too familiar flourishes of a certain style of Continental handwriting. How it had found its way there so quickly, conspirators, who know how to stick threats to the walls of royal bedchambers with daggers, alone can tell. But Phœbe was no more surprised at finding it than, after the first start of recognition, she had been surprised to find her melodramatic lover himself at the door of Cautleigh Hall. Such things were the merest matters-of-course in her world, where wonderful events and startling coincidences are always happening to everybody four-and-twenty times a day. And she read :

‘You have surprise. But never mind. Only tell not which I am. It is my leif I trust to you. You shall know, all at the hour, whom I do here. Before I speak, you shall seem as if I am strange. S. A.’

Truly, at last the romance of life had come to Phœbe as it comes to few.

She was in a great country mansion, large and remote enough to pass, without much help from fancy, for a feudal castle or baronial hall. Hither she had been sent by a stern and tyrannical father to be parted from the most romantic of lovers. Nothing had been forgotten, even down to the duenna and to the brilliant company in the midst of which she was to feel herself alone.

But all these precautions had been in vain. Her lover had actually done what, ages ago, had occurred to her during some waking fancy. For her sake, and to rescue her, he had entered the castle disguised as a serving-man. How had he obtained his knowledge of where she was to be found? The question was absurd. Was heroine ever yet carried off and not discovered by the hero, by some extraordinary coincidence, in the very nick of time? And then, 'It is my life I trust to you.' It would indeed be at the risk of his life that a hounded Polish exile should trust himself within the walls of the lords of the soil. For of course Sir Charles Bassett would be a trusted favourite of the Czar, and would be only too glad to find such an enemy as Stanislas Adrianski in his power. Nor am I

at all sure that, if her notions of history and of international politics were hazy, they were very much more vague than those entertained by the majority of the lady guests at Cautleigh Hall. Hers, at any rate, meant something real to her mind, which was more than could be said for theirs.

The time was evidently drawing near when she would be called upon, in some unforeseen manner, to prove herself a heroine indeed. For that matter, she was compelled to take the part of a heroine even now. Had it not been for the presence beneath the same roof with herself of her heroic lover, she felt disgracefully capable of forgetting that she was at Cautleigh Hall against her will, and of feeling well content that Count Stanislas Adrianski should be in the thick of a very far-off battle. But such contemptible behaviour had not been allowed to be hers. She was a heroine for whose sake a hero had dared death and dungeons under her very eyes—that hero who seemed now to be her irresistible doom. What would happen next? Perhaps—but the possibilities of such a perhaps are too long to reckon. They implied all the plots of all the plays and novels that Phœbe knew. Anything might happen next, now.

Meanwhile, though she, with all due diligence, cultivated her consciousness of his presence, things were made easier for her by the very little which Stanislas—no doubt for the most heroic reasons—allowed her to see of him. At times, days together would pass without putting her self-possession to task by giving her a sight of the man who for love of her was putting his life in jeopardy; and, when she did see him, it was always in his capacity of Ralph Bassett's valet and before company. At such times she could not but admire this haughty noble's power of adapting himself to all the needs of the occasion. Nothing, indeed, could injure the effect of his sombre and melancholy dignity. But had he been a born valet, he could not have acted the part more perfectly. No doubt he had kept a dozen valets in his time; but only a genius for conspiracy could account for the manner in which he knew how to disarm every sort of suspicion. He never blundered, never forgot, was never distraught; he had even the self-command to refrain from a glance in her direction that might possibly tell tales.

It was upon Phœbe, at last, that the strained

excitement of so barrenly brilliant a situation began to tell. She, too, set herself to play the part of being a mere common lady-guest of the house, just as the others were, and did not find it so very hard, doing what the others did as far as she could, and taking things as they came. But to live two lives at once is always hard, especially when the secret and unseen life is the more exciting of the two. No wonder Sir Charles, with his readiness at seeing through the backs of other people's cards, thought her a peculiar girl who was hiding something, and was not altogether what she seemed.

But at last a crisis came.

One morning she found two letters on her plate—one from her father, the other in an unknown hand. She knew what her father's would be: a cumbrously light chronicle of little things which could not possibly concern the inner life of a heroine, and that were, considering that they came from a tyrant to a prisoner, uncomfortably inappropriate and out of character. But from whom could the other be? So she opened the second first, and could not help her heart beating, or feeling that something in her look was treason to the

secret of life and death which she was bound to guard. For thus it ran :

‘I write with my left hand for fear of the spies. I am to myself this afternoon, at four o’clock ; and I will walk on the path to the little gate, and you will come. If you will not come, you do not know what will come, but when you come, then you will know. A.’

Phœbe glanced round, half in fear lest her sudden confusion should have been observed. And her eyes met those of the count himself, who had come to speak to his master. And the count’s dark, deep-set eyes seemed to say : ‘Be silent—but come.’

Possibly he had known, as servants will, that no house or out-door engagement would hamper Phœbe’s movements on that short winter afternoon. As to that, she was herself of two minds. Romance bade her meet this hero of masks and mysteries, another feeling made her wish that the meeting might be rendered impossible for at least another day. The consciousness that he had put his life in peril for her sake was something to be proud of, and was nearly as delightful as it ought to be ; but a sudden summons to complicate this simple relation by a stolen inter-

view, perhaps by action, was a very different thing. Yet she never dreamed of doubting whether, if nothing happened to hinder her, she should go. On the contrary, the old shame at the very thought of doing anything cowardly, or ignoble, or in the least unworthy of an ideal heroine, inspired her to thrust away and trample down every other sort of shame. From her point of conscience, the clandestine meeting of an imprisoned girl with a disguised lover was the very crown and pinnacle of duty—an end that justified every means. And danger only doubled duty; danger to herself meant duty ten times told.

‘Will four o’clock never come?’ she asked her watch a hundred times, resolutely mistaking an instinctive dread of that fateful hour for impatient longing. But at last she heard the great house-clock itself strike four. ‘It must be fast,’ thought she, for her own watch still wanted ten minutes of the time, and she had been treating those very ten minutes as a reprieve. So she waited for fifteen minutes to make sure before hastening towards the little gate on love’s wings. And then, at last, she cloaked herself and escaped from the house at a snail’s pace, without

having the good fortune to be met by Mrs. Hassock and her inquiries on the way. In spite of love, a straw would have turned her. But she was unopposed by so much as a blade of hay. She had given destiny every chance, and destiny had refused to interfere.

There, already waiting for her, was the count, smoking a cigarette, with a successful air of waiting for nobody. He raised his hat as she appeared, and Phœbe could not help thinking that his original shabbiness suited his style far better than the brand-new clothes he wore at Cautleigh. Once more her heart beat a little, and she was glad of it, for she wanted to be glad to meet him very much indeed. He held out both his hands, but she had her hands in her muff, and, as the afternoon was cold, she kept them there. Of course she would die for him, but her hands had a will of their own.

‘You are an angel!’ exclaimed Stanislas. ‘You have not said one word, and you are come! and now——’

‘Yes,’ said she. ‘But tell me—tell me at once—what all this mystery means; of course I know why you are here, but are you in such terrible danger? Is it true?’

‘If I were not in danger, should I wear this disguise? It is true, mademoiselle. I have told you I was going to my country. Alas! once more it was not to be. We were betrayed. We are always betrayed. And so I have to hide—to fly.’

‘And you are not safe—even here?’

‘Nowhere is the head of Adrianski safe, my dear. It would not be safe under the very guillotine.’

‘Ah, then,’ said Phœbe, disappointed to feel relieved, ‘you did not know I was here at all?’

‘That you was here?’ asked Stanislas with an instant’s hesitation on the words, and another instant’s pause. ‘Ah! I was going to say, but you are so quick; I was going to say, but he will give her his head, and it shall be safe there.’

Phœbe was vexed at feeling disappointed once more, and she sighed. The part of heroine must needs be delightful, but it seemed likely to prove a little hard. Still, if only for honour’s sake, it must be played, and all the more since love needed so much spurring.

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I knew that you was here. If they have their spies, we have ours.’

Mademoiselle, my dear, there is nothing you can do I cannot know. You go to the theatre with an ancient man—who knows it? Adrianski, he is there. You go to live at a château—who knows? Adrianski, he is here again. You shall go to the top of the moon, and you shall find Adrianski. Perhaps you shall see him prince, perhaps ramoneur, perhaps musician, perhaps valet, perhaps chiffonnier, but Adrianski always the same. One day he shall sit at the table, yesterday he shall wait behind the chair. But always Adrianski, always me.'

There was a time, before she knew that her name was Doyle, long before she had heard the name of Bassett, when these heroics would have seemed to her becoming in a gentleman. And she still accepted them as becoming in a hero; nothing more than their bloom had gone.

'Before we say another word more, tell me,' said she, 'what your danger is; tell me how I can help you. I am to be trusted as much as if I were a man, with a sword in my hand.'

So she spoke, and so she believed. But of how far her father would think her trustworthy, could he see her now in some magic mirror, she did not think at all.

‘I know it,’ said Stanislas with a bow, and a rather meaningless wave of the arm. ‘And for because I know it, I said come. I am here because I love you, and because you love me. You have not always treat me well; but I never think you not true. You are not like that woman for whom I have killed a man. Mon Dieu, mademoiselle, for you I would not kill one—I would kill ten. Because you love me, I say come; because I say come, I tell you what to do. Attend then, my dear——’

‘I like best the name you always used to call me by,’ said Phœbe.

‘What name?’

‘Mademoiselle.’

‘Pardon—I remember—I am valet now,’ said he, with a sadness of homage which made Phœbe feel remorseful for misplaced coldness and pride towards a hero in jeopardy. ‘But—never mind. All right—mademoiselle. I am in danger, mademoiselle, because I am patriot, and because I love you. I love my land, but more I love you. I fly because I am betrayed; because I love you, I fly here; because I love you I brush clothes, to see your eye who is a star; and if you are in trouble, or in a bother, for you to call,

“Stanislas à moi!” and for me to answer “Me voici—mademoiselle!” And what you can do for me? Nothing mademoiselle, except but to say not who I am; and to trust me—with five pounds.’

‘You want—money?’ asked Phœbe, at last surprised.

‘Alas! mademoiselle, it is true. Every penny of the salary I receive I scorn to touch. It is degradation; I devote it to the gunpowder of the cannons of my unhappy *patrie*. The estate of the Adrianski, more than forty Cautleigh, is robbed to him by the Czar; every sou he had is given to the cause. Adrianski is a beggar to the woman what loves him. It is true. But no, not a beggar, mademoiselle. Adrianski gives himself; he is yours.’

Phœbe searched for a precedent in vain. In all her large experience, no question of money had ever arisen between a pair of lovers. Heroes and heroines were often poor, but to help one another with downright hard cash they were never known. Still, there remained the facts that she was rich, and that the man who was daring death and Siberia for her sake was as penniless as he was proud.

‘Is that all I can do for you?’ asked she.

‘That is all. At least—it is quite all. With five pounds I can act, for you—for me. You shall see what you shall see. But never mind. I ask no money for any common things. It is Poland who thanks you; it is the country whom you serve.’

She removed one hand from her muff at last, and, after a battle with her cloak, found her purse with two five-pound notes in it, and gave one of these to the cause of Poland. Stanislas took it in what is held to be the most gentlemanly fashion—that is to say, with an absent air, as if he did not know that he was taking it at all.

‘When it is need to meet,’ said he, ‘I shall not write, nor shall you. If I want you, I shall wear my pin of my cravat who is like what you call a knock—like so,’ he said, closing one fist. ‘And you shall wear those earrings which is in you now when you want me; and if the answer is to touch the shoulder, so, then we shall meet here to this hour at that day. The knocks, the rings, the shoulder—so. We must be secret; we must conspire. We are together, we two.’

They parted, but not like lovers. Phœbe

felt angry with herself at feeling coldly when her part demanded all her fervour. Stanislas was evidently too high-minded a gentleman not to respect a woman's moods. But though he had displayed so many admirable traits of character, considering the shortness of the interview, she was by no means satisfied. There were hundreds of things he might have said, even in that short while, that he did not say. Only one thing was clear—that the hero of her romance was in pressing need and in utmost danger, and that his safety depended upon her silence and might depend upon her courage before things were at an end.

The plot was thickening. If only she could work herself up to care enough whether Count Stanislas Adrianski were sent to Siberia or no! But in any case his going there must be no fault of hers. And if only the danger, and therefore the heroism, of her hero could seem to her deepest heart quite so real as she resolutely believed them to be—but then, if she kept on trying very hard, no doubt the care and the deeper seeming would come. She must not fail in the duties of a heroine merely because she was weak and they were hard

How she would scorn herself in a book, if she failed !

These were her thoughts when there happened to her the very last thing of which she was thinking.

She found herself face to face with the wicked and desperate lover—the mortal enemy who knew Stanislas, and with whom her true lover's life would not be safe for an hour. She had, at a moment's notice, to find courage and action indeed. And she was so bewildered that she knew not what to do or what to say.

CHAPTER XV

MISS DOYLE'S DIAMONDS

‘THERE lived, in an obscure and humble quarter of a great city, a young girl who knew nothing of herself but this—that she was not the daughter of the man whom she called father, and that she had a soul very much above her neighbours. And there fell in love with her two young men—one, a gloomy, churlish foster-brother, whose active character was composed of jealousy and violence ; the other, a noble foreign exile, picturesque in person, an accomplished artist, of gentle manners, and with a dash of old-fashioned Byronic dignity. The rejected churl, maddened with jealousy and revenge, took advantage of one dark night to attack his rival, and, to escape the consequences, fled beyond the sea. But it was not fated that the course of true love should run smoothly, even now. The girl was claimed as his child by a mysterious

stranger who suddenly returned from the East, rolling in gold. She had no choice but to submit to the claim. But should wealth make a woman false? Surely no—and all the more surely no, when the man to whom she should be true is on the eve of dying, more likely than of conquering, in a great and noble cause. For truth's sake she suffered persecution, even to imprisonment, at her father's hands. But her lover proved a match for them all. The cause for which he had courted death or victory had been lost and betrayed. Yet, like a veritable hero of romance, he followed her, in disguise, into the very castle where she was confined, though his discovery would imply a defeated rebel's doom. And then to this very castle there came the jealous and defeated lover, the violent and unscrupulous enemy—the very man of all others whom there was special reason to fear.'

Thus reads Phœbe's romance so far. And there can be no question that, taken just as she read it, it had at last become desperately real. It is true that the romance, like all others, took no notice whatever of things from the tyrannical father's or rejected lover's point of view. Rightly enough; for if these

were considered, an unfortunate reader would not be able to distinguish hero from villain, and would constantly blunder into sympathy with the wrong man. He might fancy, with Doyle, that Phœbe was in danger of becoming perversely cunning, and might think that some gratitude was due from her to the man who, despite or because of all her faults, had learned, from her absence, what loneliness means. He might even fancy that Phil Nelson was very nearly as fine a fellow as Stanislas Adrianski, and that he showed much more folly than villainy in his manner of loving her. It would be even more bewildering than it would be interesting to read a version of *Ivanhoe* written in the interest of Brian de Bois-Gilbert. But, for Phœbe, the more sides of the shield were omitted, the clearer were those which remained. Whatever had been unreal heretofore was real enough now. For Phil was real—terribly real; so everything else must be real too. It was impossible to make Phil Nelson the pivot of a dream.

I am not going to claim for that dinner at Cautleigh Hall the distinction of being an exceptional nest of misunderstandings. On the contrary, the next dinner-party, given

anywhere, will contain quite as many eggs of that sort, and very likely a great many more. But there were certainly a few. There was Sir Charles Bassett, as sure as of his life that Phœbe was there to collect evidence where-with to beggar him. There was Philip, in doubt, even while sitting by the side of the woman to whom he had given up his very reason, whether she were in truth that woman or no. There was Phœbe herself, believing the life of an English gentleman's valet to be in danger from the Czar and Philip Nelson—terrified by the consciousness that she ought to do everything, while she knew not what to do. The list is not complete by any means, but it was long enough to defy even common sense, for once, to reach the bottom, unless it were a great deal more profound than Phœbe Doyle's.

Even Philip's was obscured instead of being made clearer by the light of the next morning. He had dreamed heavily ; and the result was an increase of certainty that his discovery of Phœbe in Miss Doyle must have been part of some general craze, which the sharp light of a winter morning was bound to scatter. He went over the whole story

once more, and convinced himself that he would deserve a mad-house if he allowed fancies and likenesses to protest another moment against due submission to reason, or himself to be tricked by so notoriously deceptive a sense as that of sight. He did not inquire too closely how far he was disappointed not to have found Phœbe in Miss Doyle. It was enough, for the present, to be convinced that he must let his anxiety imagine her likeness in every young woman whom he might happen to see. So, once more making up his mind to wait and work patiently for nothing, he left his room and, finding himself an inconveniently early riser, went out upon the terrace to clear his brain yet more completely in the raw air.

But he did not prove to be quite so exceptionally an early riser as he had at first believed. Presently Ralph Bassett came lounging along the terrace, and hailed him with the self-conscious geniality of a man who is proud of having seen the sun rise, though but the latest of winter suns.

‘Good-morning—if you’d not been so late, you might have gone round with me to the stables. I’ve been looking after old Mab, for

Miss Doyle. What became of you last night? You never turned up in the smoking-room. Lawrence and I were there till nearly two; I suppose he'll turn up again somewhere about the afternoon. What are you going to do? My father can't manage the Holms to-day, I hear. I'd ride over there with you myself only I've got to act riding-master, and we've got a rehearsal in the afternoon. But no doubt there'll be something or other going on.'

'I think I'll go over the Holms by myself,' said Phil, 'and take a look round before going with Sir Charles. I rather like having the first sight of things with my own eyes.'

'Well, if you like to do that, you shall have a mount, and I'll have one of the keepers told off for guide. The Holms are awkward to get into, and a good deal more awkward to get out of again. You haven't seen my man anywhere about, have you? But I suppose one mustn't expect one's masters to get up before they please, whatever we may do ourselves. But—— Miss Doyle! Aren't you surprised to see me?'

It was certainly Miss Doyle who suddenly came from the steps of the terrace that led into a sort of lower garden; and Phil noticed

that she started slightly, as if to find the terrace occupied before breakfast were really something remarkable. And it seemed to Phil that, by daylight, in less unaccustomed costume, she was even more completely a double of Phœbe than she had been in evening dress and by lamplight.

She had indeed a warmer colour than Phœbe's had ever been, but sharp air and early exercise would account for that, and even in Miss Doyle it seemed too deep and too sudden to be normal. Had Ralph been absent he must, in spite of all his reasonable resolutions, have put her to some absolutely decisive test, whatever the result or effect might be. But for this it was needful to be alone. He could only watch and listen. He could not even say a common good-morning to a girl whom Nature had made in the same mould with her for caring a straw about whom he now almost hated himself.

Miss Doyle did not seem to notice the existence of a man whose behaviour, or rather want of behaviour, towards her at dinner had certainly given him no claim to a single hour's place in her memory.

‘No,’ she said hurriedly to Ralph. ‘I

suppose you like the early morning too. But I—I must run in now, or Mrs. Hassock will be having the pond dragged for me,' she said hurriedly, with a sort of half laugh, and passed on. Nothing in her words or manner, scarcely in her voice, was in the least like Phœbe. It was a sort of relief that unlikeness was the effect that she left behind.

'There certainly is something out of the common about that girl,' said Ralph reflectively. 'She's the only girl I ever knew who cared twopence about air or exercise or Nature before breakfast or alone. They're all such humbugs in general—but there can't be humbug in turning out on a winter's morning with nobody to see. However—come and have some breakfast. I told that man of mine to see that some was ready as soon as I came in from the stables. I don't see why the late birds should condemn the early ones to wait for their worms.'

Phil followed him into the breakfast-room. But there were none of the expected signs of an early breakfast; so Ralph rang the bell, and asked if it had not been ordered half an hour ago. Not even that, however, had been done.

‘Well,’ said Ralph, trying to be angry, ‘it’s clear that it’s not the early bird who picks up anything. I suppose that fellow’s still snoring, if the truth were known. You must wait, I suppose. I’ll prepare for heavy business, and look to you to help me.’

Phil remained in the parlour till breakfast became a fact, and the later sleepers began to drop in, one by one, Mrs. Urquhart being in the first flight. But Miss Doyle, though she must have been up among the very first of the company, did not appear. Sir Charles himself never showed at breakfast, which was spread at Cautleigh Hall over the whole forenoon, and was an eminently unsocial meal. The present was an especially loose and lazy morning, as there was to be a full rehearsal in the afternoon, and few other plans or engagements had been made. Phil scarcely knew why he lingered, except that he had to ask Ralph presently about getting to the Holms, where he fully intended to spend the rest of the day. But at last Miss Doyle herself entered, alone, when the room was nearly empty, and seated herself as quietly as possible at a corner of the table.

‘I’ve been seeing after Mab, Miss Doyle,’

said Ralph, while doing double justice to his long-deferred meal. 'You remember your promise of last night, and, as you're not in the play, you won't be fined for absence from rehearsal. I'm going to teach you the whole art and mystery of riding in a single lesson. When shall you be ready? In an hour?'

'Yes,' said Phœbe, afraid of anything more dangerous than single syllables before Phil—not imagining that he could doubt her identity, and therefore all the more afraid of some explosion. She would have kept her room yet longer had she known that he was still in the breakfast-room. That he did not openly proclaim his recognition of her ~~was~~ in itself a cause for alarm, all the more vast for being vague.

'All right; Mab and I will be ready in an hour. And I'll see about your mount and guide, Mr. Nelson, if you really want to ride over to the Holms. You'd better come round to the stables with me now, and——'

The door opened; and there entered, not Lawrence or any other professionally late riser, but Mrs. Hassock, looking like a thunder-cloud upon its dignity.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, 'but I've

duties to myself as well as others, and I've a right to do as I'd be done by. I've a right to have my trunks and boxes searched through and through, if I'm to stay in this house another hour.'

She looked neither at Phœbe nor at Ralph, but appeared to be addressing the abstract justice of the world at large.

'And I request,' she added, 'not to be lost out of sight till my trunks and my boxes have been searched, through and through.'

'Why, what's the matter?' asked Ralph. 'Of course you may have your boxes searched if you like, but certainly not without knowing why.'

'Thank you, sir. Then, if you please, I'll have 'em searched now. And if you find in one of 'em a gold watch and chain, I'll consent to send for the police myself and be took to gaol.'

Ralph suddenly looked grave. 'Let me tell you something at once, Mrs. Hassock,' said he. 'There is one thing that nobody is ever allowed to do at Cautleigh—and that is to make mysteries. Tell me at once what you mean.'

'Perhaps Miss Doyle will kindly remember

when she last looked at her watch, and see if she's got it on now. And perhaps she'll excuse me not speaking to her in private, seeing how I've got a public character that's got to be kept up and seen to. If I've mis-taken, I'm sorry I spoke—that's all.'

Naturally all eyes turned upon Miss Doyle, and all eyes saw that her cheeks were aflame.

'My watch?' said she. 'Why I took it out with me this morning—and——'

'Then that's all right,' said Ralph, 'and Mrs. Hassock must be content to lose her character for never making much ado about nothing. Now, Mr. Nelson, if you're ready——'

'Nothing it may be, sir,' said Mrs. Hassock. 'I know my manners too well to contradict, I'm sure. Perhaps, miss, you've got your watch on. And perhaps, if you haven't, as I don't see it nor the chain, then perhaps you took out your purse, and your jewel-case, out into the park too. And perhaps if you didn't take them, you might have thought you took out your watch when you might have forgotten——'

'You mean to say that a watch, and money, and jewels are missing from Miss Doyle's room—in this house? Impossible——'

‘If you say ’tis impossible, sir, no doubt it is impossible. P'r'aps they've walked away, of their own selves. But I don't choose to have it thought they've walked into my boxes—that's all.’

‘Have you your watch, Miss Doyle?’ asked Ralph. ‘Where are these things of yours? Don't you know? You must forgive me, but this is our house, and your maid seems to be hinting robbery against somebody. Are any of these things lost? Or is it only a mare's nest, after all?’

Phoebe, from red, turned pale. ‘Robbery?’ asked she. ‘No——’

‘Perhaps we'd better not talk here. My father must hear this—would you mind coming to him into the library? And you, Mrs. Hassock, will come too. I would sooner lose everything I have than have you lose a single sixpence here—and there isn't a servant on the place that I wouldn't trust with untold gold. Come, Miss Doyle, if you please. Mab must wait, now.’

The guests who had been present at this unexpected scene did not disperse. A little household drama, piquantly suggestive of a mystery at somebody else's expense, seemed

likely to compete for interest with the play to be rehearsed that afternoon. Jewel-robberies in great country houses were not then the regular part of the day's business that they have since become, and had to a considerable extent the zest of novelty.

'The Doyle lost her diamonds?' asked Lawrence, dropping in at last, and hearing a more circumstantial account of the matter than the case thus far entirely warranted. 'We must get up "The Merchant of Venice," and have old Doyle down for Shylock—he'll be in the humour, when he hears.'

'Perhaps they were paste,' said Mrs. Urquhart. 'Miss Doyle seemed to take the matter very coolly—very curiously, so she seemed to me.'

No; it could not be that Phoebe had turned into a young lady with diamonds and a maid, even were it possible that she could have spent her whole girlhood both in India and in London. In this sense, certainly in no other, this fuss about a young lady's trinkets had a sort of interest for Phil; and they settled every question except that of his own complete sanity. Miss Doyle had certainly received the first news of her supposed loss

very curiously, if not very coolly. So much even he had seen. But that could in no manner concern him, since Miss Doyle could not possibly be Phœbe Burden. The talk buzzed on around him unheard, until Sir Charles Bassett himself came into the room, with Ralph and Mrs. Hassock, but without Miss Doyle.

‘I’m sorry to say that a most painful thing seems to have happened,’ said he. ‘It is quite clear that Miss Doyle has lost from her room all her jewellery, her watch, and all the money she has with her. Besides that, one of my servants is missing—my son’s foreign valet. Last night, he and they were safe; this morning, they and he are gone. I shall, of course, put off every engagement in order to communicate with the police. If the thief has not caught the morning train—which is next to impossible—he can’t possibly be very far away. Meanwhile, I hope nothing worse has happened—though I can hardly talk of anything worse, for myself, than that such a thing should have happened in my house, to any guest of mine. I mean—I hope the thief had not made off with anything except Miss Doyle’s.’

Then, indeed, in something like a sudden confusion, all in the room were scattered, except Sir Charles, Ralph, Lawrence, and Phil. Phil had nothing to lose; Lawrence had but just left his room, and had exceedingly little to lose. But Mrs. Urquhart had brought all her valuables *en masse* to Cautleigh Hall, and there were others who had things that were of real value, and maids who might not have proved proof against the fascinations of a foreign valet.

‘I’ll ride over to the police myself,’ said Ralph to his father. ‘You needn’t go——’

‘No. I must go myself,’ said Sir Charles. ‘Miss Doyle—nobody must think that the utmost trouble is spared. So Miss Doyle was out walking before breakfast, it seems. That’s your opinion, Mrs. Hassock—that the thief must have found his way into her bedroom while she was out of doors? But I beg your pardon, Mr. Nelson. This household trouble of ours cannot concern you, and must not be allowed to waste your time. You are going to ride over to the Holms, I hear. Ralph, you had better put Mr. Nelson on the road. I’ll ride over myself to-morrow, if I possibly can.—I’m going to ask you a question or two,

Mrs. Hassock,' he said, as soon as the three young men left the room together. 'Don't for a moment think they have anything to do with any possible suspicion of you. You may take it that you are absolutely clear. But I may have to do with this business as a magistrate, and before I see the police there are some things I must know. How long have you been in the service of Mr. and Miss Doyle?'

'Oh, Sir Charles, as to that, you may ask me what you please. I've offered to be searched, as I've took care to have witnesses to prove. I've been months in my place, and I came to it with the best of characters.'

'You were not with Miss Doyle in India?'

'I was not, Sir Charles. But I've lived in the best Indian families.'

'So you know their habits—eh? A great many old Indians are early risers, I believe. Is Miss Doyle in the habit of taking walks before breakfast? The thief might get to learn her ways, you see; and nobody else, it seems, has lost a single thing.'

'She is not, Sir Charles. She mostly lies in bed till the last minute, so to say. And I never knew her to go out of an early morning before.'

‘Why did you not tell Miss Doyle of her loss, instead of proclaiming it before a whole roomful of company?’

‘Why? Because I had to think of my own jewels—and that’s my character, Sir Charles. That’s why. Whatever happens they can’t say I didn’t offer up my trunks to be searched through and through, open and fair.’

‘I believe you to be an honest, truthful, respectable woman, Mrs. Hassock.’

‘I am, Sir Charles. None more so, anywhere.’

‘Did you ever see this Stanislas What’s-his-name, my son’s valet, before you saw him here?’

‘No, Sir Charles. Never but once, when he came to our house with a letter—I thought he was some never-do-good, up to some mischief of his own, but when I came here and found he was naught but Mr. Bassett’s own man, then, of course, I knew the ins and the outs better than I did then. And that’s the only time I’ve set eyes on him—and I hope ’twill be the last, before I see him at Botany Bay.’

‘Thank you, Mrs. Hassock; that will do.—

No,' thought he, 'Ralph never sent a letter by that man to Miss Phœbe Doyle. But the maid's honest; if she hadn't spoiled matters by publishing the whole affair at once, we needn't have heard a word of this before a very long to-morrow. Well, it won't do to have in the police to find out why Miss Doyle stole her own jewels and her own watch and her own purse. That question must be for me. No—she's not such a first-rate actress after all.'

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE MIST

A PLUNDERED dressing-room—a thievish valet. Sir Charles Bassett might see something dark and dangerous floating about beneath the muddy surface, but to the house in general the combination was nothing more than pleasantly exciting. To Phœbe herself the discovery was indeed thrice confused confusion. That she had warned the proscribed nobleman of his peril, that she had eagerly given her watch to help a penniless lover to escape from his enemies, nobody, not even Sir Charles himself, knew better than she. A lucky sight, from behind her blind, of Stanislas crossing the terrace in the direction of the stables, a sudden impulse, a desperate resolution, a hurried flight into the park, a snatch of breathless talk—all this was on her consciousness, if not on her conscience, during the scene at the breakfast-table, and had made

her conduct as peculiar as anybody could desire. But she had not been so mad as to carry her trinkets out into the park to be missed by her duenna; her watch she had given, but her jewels had been stolen. There, at any rate, Mrs. Hassock's clamour had been right; Sir Charles Bassett's silent assurance had been wrong. Nor had she given Stanislas her purse; that also she had left in her room when she hurried downstairs. What had become of them? Not so much as a suspicion entered her brain that a hero of romance, because he had been given a part of her treasures, therefore held himself entitled to make free with the whole. A wicked, flourishing marquis might do such things, but not a count in disguise; for disguise is the very livery of Honour. To say that she did not suspect is almost to say too much, for it is in a manner to hint at a suspicion that did not come even near enough to her to be scouted and denied. Somebody must have taken these things—there were other servants in the house—but who? Yet she could not defend Stanislas without betraying him. And it was altogether desperately unlucky. The police would be at once upon the alert to catch a

common thief, and would thus cut off every avenue of escape from Stanislas Adrianski. They would go out for a fox and would find a lion. If only the real thief had been considerate enough to put off his or her *coup* till to-morrow ! Stanislas would have been clear off by then, and the scent would have been led away.

She felt like anything but a heroine when she escaped at last from the informal court of inquiry in the library back to her bedroom. 'The police'—she had heard the word spoken, and its very sound went far to vulgarise even the romance of a hunted patriot and an imprisoned maiden. Had Sir Charles summoned his serfs and retainers by bugle-horn to hunt an outlaw, she knew, or supposed she would have known, what to do. But to have a knight-errant tracked, and perhaps caught, by a county constable in a blue coat—that was beyond knowledge. And that blue coat with a stiff collar might find her watch upon the supposed valet in another hour. She would not be able to say, 'That is not my watch ;' for Mrs. Hassock could contradict her, and, even if she could bribe or persuade her duenna to silence, her mono-

gram could not be persuaded or bribed to disappear. She would not be able to say, 'I, a young lady, made a present of my watch to Mr. Ralph Bassett's valet,' because then she would have to say why. Yet, if she did not say so, Stanislas would escape the Siberian mines only to fall upon an English treadmill. And what should she write home—to her father? Some sort of letter must be written, and at once; and what in the world should she say?

And she had wasted tears over the sorrows of heroines who had never suffered from policemen, and postmen, and the hundred things which make, in these days, the career of a heroine difficult indeed. Once upon a time—to be as precisely exact in dates as possible—it would have been so easy to make great deeds marry with great desires. Now all was changed; and Phœbe felt that fate was growing too much for her, that things must be as they must be, and that she had been born terribly after her time. But this was only in the background. How soon would Stanislas Adrianski be brought handcuffed, like a common thief, between two common policemen, to Cautleigh Hall? All

she could do was to throw open her window, and from a curtained corner look out over the park, in a state of suspense beside which, she felt sure, all the heartaches of which she had ever read had been as nothing. Nay, less than nothing; for those hearts had ached with love. 'And so do I!' cried Phœbe's. 'That is all that is left me to do, and I will. I am in torture because I love Stanislas, and because we shall be parted, he to the mines, I to despair, and I shall never see him or hear his voice again.' The fear felt curiously like hope; but, for that very reason, she gained the greater strength to keep on despairing, with all her might and main. As to the outward upshot, the arrest of Stanislas, her having to make a public choice between betraying him to the mines and leaving him to the treadmill, the exposure of her inner life, the confusion, the explosion, the ridicule worse than tragedy which must crown the drama of her destiny—all these made up a very different sort of fear, and compelled love and its despair to fight hard for their very lives.

Only through all Phœbe's follies, falsehoods, and fears, through all her feeble

fancies, and phantom vanities, and savage ignorances, there ran the one ruling note that was, and had been from the beginning of her story, their end, their life, their cause : 'I'll be the highest I know of, and if I can't be all, I'll be all I can.' Ralph Bassett had never said so much—Philip Nelson had never said more.

'So Miss Doyle has got a headache—and no wonder—and can't ride,' said Ralph to Phil, 'and my father won't leave the police to me, and it's too late now to do anything worth doing before that confounded rehearsal. And Lawrence is no good—his stage fever gets hot as mine gets cool. I'll cut the rehearsal to-day. I'm the only one of the company who knows his part or hers, so I'll give the rest a chance of making up leeway. So if you're still game for the Holms, I'm your man. I want to gallop off my temper—Miss Doyle to be robbed, and here! I was never in such a rage since I was born. And by my own man! I feel like a thief myself. I shall have to live like a miser till I can buy her a Koh-i-noor, unless her things are found. Are you game for a gallop across country—bullfinches and all?'

‘I don’t know,’ said Phil. ‘There were no fences where I learned to ride. But I certainly mean the Holms, whatever’s in the way.’

‘I’m more vexed about this business than I can say,’ said Ralph, as they rode down the avenue towards the road. Phil was anything but a graceful horseman, but he had done his share of rough riding on the steppes, and had the hand, if not the knees, that a horse understands and obeys. Or perhaps it was the mind and not so much the hands—horses are human enough to make it mean much the same thing. ‘Miss Doyle is the only stranger among us all, and that she should have been singled out is an abominable shame. And my own man; there’s only one comfort—he wasn’t an Englishman.’

‘What was he? A Frenchman?’ asked Phil, curious, although he had convinced himself she was not Phoebe, about anything and everything that concerned Miss Doyle.

‘A Pole.’

‘Which means—scoundrel,’ said Phil, thinking of Stanislas Adrianski, as the type of a Pole. ‘I have been in Russia, and I know.’ He was a mathematician; therefore

a reasoner. But a mathematician, when in love, has not been found to differ much from men who have never so much as heard of the hyperbola. Stanislas Adrianski had carried off Phœbe Burden. Stanislas Adrianski is a Pole. Therefore a Pole is a scoundrel.

‘I wish I was called,’ said Ralph—‘to the bar, I mean,’ he added, condescending to explanation for the benefit of a lay and unenlightened engineer. ‘I’d prosecute my servant as hotly as if I were defending him; I’d get him penal servitude for life, and be made attorney-general on the spot for my eloquence and all that sort of thing. It’s a confounded nuisance altogether. If the scoundrel’s caught he’ll have to be tried; and Miss Doyle will have to swear to her jewels, and how she had them safe.’

And so he ran and rambled on about Miss Doyle and her diamonds till Philip Nelson became vaguely jealous on account of a girl who, not being Phœbe, was of no earthly account to him. They were riding towards an open gate, but he put his horse at the hedge and cleared it handsomely, while Ralph took the easier way.

Ralph nodded approval. ‘*Qui m’aime*,’ he

shouted with a laugh, and led off at a gallop, Phil following with good will.

Without anything more in the shape of talk, the two young men, seemingly so opposite in all qualities and conditions, had become friends before they reached the threshold of the dreary prospect that signifies Cautleigh Holms. Ralph's gallop was whim; Phil's something more than whim—the need of working off a ferment which troubled his heart, and which he honestly believed was troubling his brain. But the conditions were the same; the swift, straight rush against the slight, sharp wind, the subtle sympathy between horse and man, the conquest of accidental or intentional difficulties, the rivalry of ridership, the sharp taste of the air already salt with the sea. The supposed right to pride was on the side of Ralph. But the real pride of self was on the side of Phil. So that Ralph, in heart, lowered himself, Phil exalted himself, and both met half way. Ralph was, and had to remain, the gentleman, in the sight of all who hold, and rightly hold, that by 'Nature's gentleman' we may mean more than simply gentleman, but never exactly the same. Yet across the gulf of circumstances men may join

hands. And a frank gallop together through the same air is the best hand-shake in the world.

The Holms proved to be, as Philip had been given to understand, a wide and desolate tract of marsh-land, dotted here and there with island hillocks of rank vegetation, which promised fertility should the whole be reclaimed from the state of half-flood which was its normal condition. Probably these marshes had at some period or other been under the waves of the now far-away sea. Parts already formed natural water-meadows, affording occasional pasture, but in general the waste was as complete as the steppes which had been Phil's last field of work, and far less habitable.

'There's your work before you,' said Ralph, reining up on a roughly run-up causeway whence was to be had the most characteristically dreary view of these marshes which a thin winter mist now rendered doubly drear. 'It doesn't look much like a gold mine; but it's the best snipe-shooting in England, Nelson. I shouldn't myself have the heart to turn the Holms into a lot of common cornfields. But then I should never have the heart to be an engineer at all. I believe you wouldn't

stick at pulling down the Alps, if you knew how.'

'When Nature makes blunders, they have to be put straight,' said Phil, settling the question once for all.

'Nature never blunders,' said Ralph. 'If only one thing is ever right, and everything else is always wrong, then she blundered woefully either in making you or in making me, for we're as unlike as if we'd been turned out by different hands. I should hate a world turned out by an engineer. Not that you can make even a couple of railway lines as you would like to.'

'Then you think that Nature never makes two things the same?'

'Never. Not even two leaves.'

'Not the two Lesurques—not the two Martin Guerres?'

'No, nor the two Dromios; and not even Shakespeare could do it.'

'Then you would not believe me if I told you that here, in your own house, is a lady so like a girl with whom I was brought up as if we were brother and sister that, when I met her last night, I could not get it out of my head that they were the same?'

‘Not believe that you thought so? Of course I should believe. But that you couldn’t find plenty of difference if you saw them side by side—no. Which girl do you mean?’

‘Miss Doyle.’

‘Perhaps they are relations?’

‘No. The girl I mean was a foundling, brought up by my father and mother—and my father is, or was, a struggling copying-clerk who has never been out of London since I was born. And yet she is as like Miss Doyle, who has always lived in India, and has diamonds to lose, as if the two were one.’

‘A foundling? I wonder if old Doyle had twins before he turned nabob. Now let me see what’s the best way of getting you into one of our show-bogs; you’ll want to see the worst at once, I suppose. There’s a fine one, I know, out there—but I’m afraid getting there’s not so easy at this time of year; or for that matter at any time. Let me see—if you don’t mind waiting here a few minutes, I’ll ride out and scout. I know the ground, and there’s less chance of my meeting with the fate of Edgar of Ravenswood than you. If I’m not back before midnight, you may give me up till you find me in the shape of an ob-

struction to one of your draining pipes. If it's all right, I'll wave my hat, and you can follow.'

Philip watched his new friend dismount, lead his horse from the causeway, and, having remounted on a starting place of fairly firm ground, proceed at a walk as straight towards a distant osier-copse as the horse's instinctive wisdom would allow. The way seemed passable, but uncertain; at any rate Ralph neither signalled nor turned. The delay, however, seemed by no means long. The possibilities of preternatural likenesses were once more disturbing Phil's mind. If Ralph was right, and if such things were indeed beyond the working laws of Nature, then Phœbe was not like, but was, Miss Doyle—that is to say, of two impossibilities the more incredible was the less impossible. 'I must speak to her,' thought he, 'come of it what will.' Then he tried to consider what he had already seen of the Holms, and to attend to business in spite of Miss Doyle. He must not think, in working hours, of anything but work. So he worked out, in his mind, a quadratic equation by way of pulling his mind together, and then—Ralph Bassett suddenly disappeared. A thick wreath

of mist had come between the causeway and the osier-copse, and made the prospect a faithful picture of Phil's own mind, wherein all that he did not care to see was clear and plain, all that he did care to see, blotted and blurred.

There did not appear to be any particular danger, because Ralph would have nothing to do but wait where he was till the mist should pass away. But it was certainly awkward, because, for aught Phil could tell, a mist on the Holms might be a matter of hours—it might last till sunset even. On the other hand, it might be a matter of minutes only ; in any case Phil had to stay where he was, like a sentry on duty, if only that Ralph might not miss a landmark as soon as the fog cleared.

Minutes passed, and the fog did not clear. On the contrary it grew thicker and deeper, though, with the seeming caprice of mists, whether mind-born or marsh-born, it held well away from Phil's own post on the causeway, and stood over the marsh about three hundred yards away, less like a veil than a wall. It was more like a sea-fog than anything Phil had ever seen on shore, and told him a good deal about what the nature of his report on the

Holms would have to be. How long was this going to last, even if it was not going to end in cause for serious anxiety? At the end of about half an hour he shouted, but no answer came.

To wait patiently was all he could do. And at last patience seemed on the point of being rewarded. The mist thinned and lifted a little, and broke on the left and shifted on the right. But it soon settled down again, with this result—that the copse and the rider were as closely veiled as ever, while the causeway itself was covered in the direction of the way home. Not only was Ralph out of sight, but Phil's own retreat was cut off for the time. Yet, all the while, his own part of the causeway, and its continuation through the marshes, were left clear. As he looked out towards the invisible osiers, there was dense fog in front, dense fog to the right along the road, and a gathering film behind. But overhead and to the left the air was nothing more than a little damp and dull.

It is a good thing, however, to be on horseback now and then, if only for the sake of having somebody to think of besides oneself, and besides what one loves better than oneself; which last is double selfishness if it keeps

out the rest of the world. One cannot forget a horse to the same extent as one can forget one's fellow-creatures. Phil was beginning to feel himself growing damp and cold, so he kept moving in order to prevent Sir Charles Bassett's horse from getting colder. He became conscious at last of a curious but not wholly unwelcome sensation of being in his life, as well as for the moment, cut off from the whole world, and alone. Absolute loneliness had not upon him its lately developed effect upon Doyle, because he had never known the contrary—he certainly did not miss Romaine. Phœbe was lost—must be lost. He might, if he ever saw her again, put formal questions to Miss Doyle, but he knew beforehand what the answer would be; that a rich girl, just home from India, had never heard the name of Nelson or been aware of a double. And since Phœbe was lost, what then? There lay the Holms: the land and the work nearest his hand. Every vain bewilderment about Phœbe was henceforth treason to the Holms. 'There lies my best,' thought he, looking out straight at the dead, blank, wet, grey wall. 'And if it can't be my all, I'll make it all I can.'

All at once, while in his course of mounted sentry to and fro he rode towards the mist upon the causeway, he heard footsteps approaching. Hope suggested the escape and return out from the fog of Ralph Bassett, helped either by lucky accident or judicious skill. But had it been Ralph, whether mounted or on foot, he would have heard the steps of Ralph's horse, and he heard none. Next best to Ralph, however, would be a native who knew the Holms and who might be of service as a guide. Instead of calling out, therefore, he rode straight on, and met the owner of the approaching footsteps just where the air began to clear.

It was the form of a phantom giant which seemed, at first, to separate itself from the broken edge of the mist and to glide towards him. But this optical illusion soon resolved itself into a wet, muddy figure, limp and weary-looking, with a hurried and anxious gait, as if it had been utterly lost in the fog and had been wandering about in some devil's circle for hours. Then it became clearer still. And then the brain of Philip Nelson seemed consciously to reel, as he saw, straight in front of him, and yet still as if some phantom of

the marsh mist, a face that had haunted his fevered dreams on the steppes of Russia—a thin sallow face, with dark, deep eyes set in a frame of long black hair. But his brain did not reel for long.

‘If there are two Phœbe Burdens, there are not two Stanislas Adrianskis — thank Heaven for so much!’ he exclaimed in spirit, as he felt the mist half clearing, and rode forward in the spirit of a dog upon a wolf.

CHAPTER XVII

TURPIN MAÎGRÉ LUI

AT last Philip Nelson knew that he was not suffering from the effects of typhoid, and that, as to the exact resemblance of Phœbe Burden to Miss Doyle, insane instinct had been right, reason and evidence had been wrong. What he was going to do he did not know. He did not think about forming a plan. Only, as the one real friend whom Phœbe had on earth, he could not let her enemy pass by and vanish back into the mist whence he came. He must act—thinking must come after.

So he rode up and laid his hand on the fellow's shoulder.

‘So I have you at last, Mr. Stanislas Adrianski!’ he said. ‘I am Philip Nelson; you may remember my thrashing if you forget my name.’

He was tolerably certain that Stanislas Adrianski was a coward—a certainty of which

he was not unwilling to take full advantage in getting at the root of things shortly and sharply. But Stanislas, though he started—and an honest man is more likely to start at an arrest than a thief who hourly expects one—neither shrank nor trembled. On the contrary, he shook off Philip's hand and fell back towards the causeway with a certain air of dignity.

‘I remember,’ said he. ‘You have attacked me by night with a stick, and I have but a guitar—now you speak, on a swift horse, to me on foot. It is like you English; you are very brave when you are strong. I have not offended you.’

‘Yes; I am stronger than you; and I am mounted, as you say; so, unless you like to take a leap into the marsh, you had better stay here till I have done with you.’

‘You have done with me? It is a pity we meet, because it makes a fuss; but there shall be none. I had business to be off, but Miss Doyle—you understand—she gave them to me out of her own hand to mine.’

‘Gave—them?’ asked Phil, not having the least reason to connect Stanislas Adrianski with Miss Doyle's diamonds or Ralph Bassett's

missing man. But his tone, coloured by general and burning indignation, might well pass with a thief for angry incredulity.

‘In this infernal region of English fog I lose myself,’ said Stanislas. ‘And it is a pity—very great pity—because it obliges me to tell the truth, which I do not like to do. You will let me pass. I say she gave me her rings, her *bijouterie*, her watch, into my hands out of hers. That is truth I do not like to tell. If a lady makes you gifts, will you go boast of your *belle fortune*? I will not boast. I go away.’

‘Go away? Not yet! You have these missing jewels then? And she——’ He had begun in open wrath, but his exclamation ended in almost a groan of despair. Could it be true that Phœbe had robbed herself of her own jewels to give them to this man? Here was Stanislas hanging round the very house where she was staying; there were the jewels gone from her, and to him—and Phil’s belief in their intimate relation was only too terribly sure. But then, how came she, if they were fellow-adventurers, to be staying at Cautleigh Hall alone? How and why had she managed to pass herself off upon Sir Charles Bassett as

Miss Doyle from India, the daughter and heiress of an old friend? What—but it would be endless to suggest the vista of enigmas that opened out before him. And yet, though forced to believe worse than he could understand, he could not see this vile scoundrel standing there and, to save himself from a charge of theft, bragging of Phœbe's favours; all the less could he bear the boast if it were true. He could not, in his heart, hope that Stanislas was lying. But, till the last atom of hope was rooted out, he could still snatch at the poor relief of saying 'That is a lie.' And he did say it with all his heart, though he felt that it was not a lie.

'Not at all,' said Stanislas. 'If you catch me for a thief you will make a grand error. That is all. If you take me to the police I shall have to say to them what I say to you.'

'For Heaven's sake, are you her husband? If you are, prove that, and then——' 'All must be over,' he was going to say; but he could not speak the words.

'You would stick me to the death, I suppose?' asked Stanislas. 'But no. I have not the honour yet to be husband of Miss Doyle. Meanwhile, we are friends. That is

all. Ask her, and she shall say. But ask her yourself; not the police, monsieur. Listen, monsieur. It is not nice to be hard. I do not want policemen. I am not a brigand; I am an honest man. I see you listen, monsieur. That is just. That is well. Is it my fault that a young miss fall in love with me? I am a very good young man. It is long ago she gave me this ring, at the corner of the street—see, him who I wear now; a very good ring. Ask her if she gave me this little ring, and she will say. Some other time, to-day, she gave me her watch, because I have business to go away; and some other time, once more, she gave me some gold. I tell you she would give me the hairs of her head and the robe of her back, and everything I ask for, if I have need. If you have a friend, a lady, you know what they will do. If I hold up the finger she comes.'

Phil's riding-switch was steadily rising in the air. But he did not yet let it fall. He felt almost paralysed by an insight into possibilities of masculine nature of which he had never dreamed. And all the while Stanislas told his story in the simplest fashion, as if the ways of women were curious, but by no means

wonderful. His behaviour would have been less revolting to every thought and feeling of Phil's had it been more like bragging. As it was, Stanislas Adrianski seemed to be to a cur what a cur is to a man. The whip rose in anger; it was compelled to fall in wondering scorn. Whips are for curs—not for Adrianskis.

‘And so,’ continued Stanislas, all unconscious of the risk his eyes had been running, ‘you will not make a fuss; for there is no fuss at all. Ah, if you knew what I have suffered—what I suffer now! I have to catch a train; I start; I make the wrong turn. I am late; I ask a peasant the way to cut short; I wander all over, till I faint and starve. I fill my boots with black water, and I fatigue. Monsieur, if you believe, I want to sit down and cry.’ He looked up as he spoke with an expression of half-proud, half-appealing pathos; and Philip saw two real tears rise and fill the eyes of Stanislas Adrianski. ‘Ah,’ he went on, ‘if she had not persuaded me to go for her sake, I would not have gone. She have make me take the *bijouterie*, and go. It was the watch who made me lose the train, and starve, and take cold in the

shoes. She did give, and I did only take, monsieur——'

“The woman—she gave me, and I did eat,” said Philip sternly. It was clearly no case for impulsive anger ; indeed, he felt himself growing numbed. Had Phœbe, for whom he would have died, really thrown herself away utterly on this man? And yet what had this to do with her imposture at Cautleigh Hall? ‘I do not believe you,’ he said. ‘I can’t believe the word of a coward who, to defend himself from a charge of theft, takes away a woman’s good name. Anyhow, I will not believe. I will speak to her—to Miss Burden—to Miss Doyle. I have the right ; I am the only protector, the only likeness to a brother, she has in the world. If you speak the truth and she gave you these things, she can give them to you again. If you are lying from beginning to end, as I hope with all my soul you are, she will have got back her own. Give me all her things, and be off with you ; and if I find you have been lying, and dare to let her see your face or hear your name again, I will stick as little at being a murderer as I do now at being a highwayman. First of all, give me that ring.’

Stanislas gave a forlorn look at the marsh below the causeway, as if some hope of escape from his enemy might lie that way. But then a leap might land him over the ears in a slime-pit; and the fog-wall looked anything but a city of refuge.

‘No,’ said Phil, seeing the look. ‘Where you can go, I can follow—and, without a horse, I to you am two to one. Give me the ring.’

‘A *gage d’amour*? No, no, no, monsieur!’

‘Give it me! Don’t you hear?’

‘Ask her if she did not give——’

‘I am going to ask her—once for all.’

‘She will give them back again.’

‘That is her affair.’

‘You will be a brigand—you will be hanged.’

‘That is my affair.’

‘She loves me—she will never forgive you!’

‘Give me that ring.’

‘How do I know you give it to her?’

‘What should a fellow like you know about keeping one’s word? Give me that ring!’

A quick thought came to him that—forgetting for the moment her still unexplained

personation of some perhaps non-existent Miss Doyle—he might be even yet unjust to Phœbe in suspecting her of having given her heart to so inconceivable a lover, and that Stanislas might have obtained some other sort of power over her from which she might be saved by strength of arm. Not that his mind leaped, as many might, to occult psychological theories of animal magnetism, or any such modern translations of the plain word witchcraft, in which he was no believer; but he did happen to know that there are many traps of a grosser and more palpable sort into which it is easy to fall, and from which it should be still more easy to escape, if people in traps ever dared to open their eyes. He had heard of women, afflicted with the opposite qualities of innocence and want of courage, who had been terrorised by some fancied hold over them—by some harmless letter, by some empty threat, or by somebody's knowledge of some idle and insignificant escapade, or by some other scarecrow which only wanted a straight look in the face to fall into its proper elements of shreds and straws. Perhaps the ring had been forced from her; perhaps its very possession by Stanislas was itself her fear by night and her

terror by day. He knew that it is robbery to rob a thief, and that the evidence was in favour of Adrianski's having come into possession of Phœbe's belongings by gift—that is to say by legally honest means. But he was not going to put Phœbe below the law.

He received the ring, and put it away. 'And now the watch.'

'I swear to you, by all what is sacred,' exclaimed Stanislas, 'she did give the watch—she did give it me this very day.'

'Then she may give it you again to-morrow. And now give up everything else of hers you have about you—every single thing.'

Something new came over Stanislas. Hitherto he had obeyed reluctantly, and as if all the while protesting his surrender to superior force. Now, however, he hurriedly threw open his coat, and, with fingers that seemed nervous with eager haste, drew from the breast-pocket a quantity of jewelled ornaments, bracelets, rings, a necklace, brooches, enough to pass for any young woman's entire stock of jewellery. He brought them out one by one ; he had been either too hurried or too careless to pack them together.

‘And the purse,’ said Phil. ‘And the money too—but the purse I must have; you shall keep nothing that you may be able to say was hers.’

‘You are hard—hard!’ sighed Stanislas. ‘I did keep that; to keep the simple purse of her which loves me—that is not much—but all right. Never mind. Here is the purse. And—and that is all.’

‘No. It is not all.’

That was a shot; for it seemed to Phil that Phœbe had jewels enough to stock an Arabian tale. But he took it for granted that Stanislas would try to keep back something, and the very hurry in which the fellow had given up so much made him suspect that the something would prove the most important of all.

‘It is all—if you shall not take my hat, and my life, and my boots,’ said Stanislas, drawing back, and again glancing at the marsh behind him. ‘She gave me not those—they are mine. I give no more. What do you miss? Do you know?’

‘I don’t know. But I know you will keep back what you can. Come here. I will take your coat, and your hat, and your shoes, and

search them myself if you don't instantly prove to me that you have nothing more. Come here, I am going to put my own hand into that breast-pocket of yours. You needn't try to throw me out of the saddle while I am doing it, I'm horseman enough to be up to that trick, and it will only waste time. Come here—and clasp your hands behind you. So. The moment you unclasp them, till I give you leave, down you go.'

Stanislas came like a bidden schoolboy, stood at Phil's stirrup, and clasped his long fingers behind him, just as he was told. He became so docile that Phil was rather taken by surprise. But the instantaneous flicker of a smile over his victim's lips led him, while making a feint towards Adrianski's breast, to seize him by the coat collar, suddenly swing him round, and cut him over the fingers sharply. Phœbe was not wrong in feeling that there was a very decided touch of the natural savage about Phil. But the sharp cut gained its end. The startled fingers fell apart, and something fell to the ground.

'Stoop!' cried Phil. 'Pick that up, whatever it is, and give it to me. No,' he added quickly, preventing Stanislas, by a thrust back-

ward, from setting foot on the something that had fallen. 'Keep back!' And without looking to see what expression the Pole's face might wear, and without leaving the bridle go, dismounted, and picked up the last prize with his own hands. It was a common leather jewel-case; there was no need to see more.

Then, for the first time on record, every shred of the dignity of Count Stanislas Adrianski went to the winds.

'She gave it me—she gave it me—she gave it me!' he almost screamed. 'She gave it me with her own hand. How she got it, how do I know? She gave me the watch, and the ring. She cannot say she did not give me all. If she will say so, she shall find none to believe.'

'And now,' said Phil, 'I have done with you. You may go. You will have this, and all else, back again if they are fairly yours. My part is done—so far. Be off with you!'

'Aha! You say be off, when you take all my riches, and my money, and leave me in the marsh and the vapours to drown and to starve! How shall I find the road? How shall I buy food without money—from the marsh fires? How shall I go by the train?

You are a veritable brigand—first you rob ; then you kill.'

'I wish to Heaven I had killed you, months ago, but it's too late ; it's no use now. No ; your death will not make the Phœbe whom I once knew alive again. As to your road, keep straight along the causeway, not the way you were coming when we met—that leads straight into the fen—but the other way ; it will bring you into the main road. I can't direct you farther, but you will surely find somebody who can. As for money—here, take this ; but mind, it is not her money—Miss Burden's—but mine. Go ! I have done with you unless we meet again. But remember this, you no longer have to do with Phœbe Burden. You have henceforth, God willing, to do with me.'

Stanislas took the sovereigns that Phil almost tossed into his hand. He took them sullenly, but he took them all the same. Then, without another word, he turned back towards the mist, and was quickly lost again.

'Have I done right or wrong ?' Phil asked himself as soon as he was left alone. 'Well, right or wrong, there was nothing else to do. I could not let him go, with his lies—yes, his lies of Phœbe, and his proofs that they are

true.' Reason took a far-away flight just then ; or it might have told him that a proven truth can hardly be a lie. But honesty may be impossible for the most honest of men. Had he been honestly honest, he would have said, 'I know the worst now. But, for her name's sake, the proofs of the worst must be in no hands but mine, till they return to hers.' But the faint flash of hope that even the proven worst might somehow be explained was still lingering, and his heart could not bring itself to throw even the memory of that faint flash away. It might be reasonable and right that Phœbe Burden, in communication with Stanislas Adrianski, should leave her home, and possess diamonds, and pass herself off for a rich heiress from India. It may be that everything which looks black is really white—it is certain that a man who loves what he hates will manage to hope that black may at any rate turn out to be grey.

But he almost shuddered when he thought of what must have happened, had not Ralph Bassett been hidden in the mist when Stanislas Adrianski appeared upon the scene. He could have found no possible excuse for highway robbery ; absolutely nothing could have been said

or done without making Phœbe's host a party to the whole miserable scandal. Whatever might be the nature or purpose of Phœbe's imposture, Philip Nelson must be its sole confidant, and his the hand to save her, not more from imposture than from exposure. Miss Doyle must disappear, and, if such might be, become some sort of Phœbe Burden again, but without ceasing to be Miss Doyle to the beliefs of Cautleigh Hall. He was not given to formulate the ways of Providence, beyond the usual assumption that Heaven helps those, and none but those, who help themselves; but there did seem the hand of something more than chance in bringing about that secret meeting between him and Stanislas Adrianski. But for a marvellous combination of seeming accidents whereof none was especially likely—the fog at the right hour, Adrianski's loss of his road on the right day, Philip's ride in that particular direction, and all the chances that led to each of these chances—nothing could have been known, nothing done. And was such a network of circumstance to be spread in vain, or for a wrong end? Such a question went far to justify hope, and to vindicate the ways of Providence before eyes which sorely

needed the vindication of any sort of belief in anything at all.

He had yet another hope—that Ralph Bassett would not return until Stanislas Adrianski had time to get clear away. He had no reason for identifying, every reason for not identifying, Stanislas Adrianski with the missing valet. That Phœbe should be a guest, Stanislas a servant, in the same house, would be carrying even mystery a little too far.

And this hope, at any rate, seemed in a fair way of being fulfilled. The mist did not lift ; and Ralph Bassett did not return.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MIST

THE fog, which had played upon Ralph so unpleasant, upon Philip so lucky a trick, did not turn out to be the monopoly of the Holms that day. It was no mere common mist, no mere ghost of a forgotten sea, that spread in capricious masses over the whole country between the Holms and the Hall.

Philip might suspect the hand of Providence in this opportune transformation of day into night ; but Stanislas was equally justified in feeling that some very special Providence, though unable to guard his jewels, must have been at work to keep him from losing his life among the marshes, as well as his way. That fog, in effect, grew and rolled out, like the genie whom the fisherman released from the bottle, till, without leaving its birthplace in the Holms, it reached Cautleigh Hall itself,

and folded the whole house round with grey.

It was more than merely lucky that the guests in general had their theatrical rehearsal on hand. They could not keep talking about the lost diamonds all day long, considering that the loss was none of theirs. Sir Charles, keeping to his own company in the library, had said nothing about having sent any message to the police—indeed the thickness of the fog was more than an excuse for not having done so; it was a reason. For himself, he needed time to consider, and luckily for him, scraps of good luck were floating about as capriciously as the fog that day, and almost as darkly—Ralph, who would certainly have demanded haste and the most energetic measures, was out of the way. Why had Rayner Bassett's daughter given her money and her trinkets to his son's servant? That she had done so, he was sure. He had only to run over the whole story in his mind, which, save for this one particular absence of motive, was a plain one. Adrianski was certainly a fellow-conspirator. He had certainly been in the habit of calling at the house of the man who called himself Doyle before,

and very shortly before, entering Ralph's service as valet. He had entered that service at the very time when Rayner Bassett's daughter came as a guest to Cautleigh Hall, and both he and she had been, while living in the same house under such opposite conditions, in secret communication. Nor did Sir Charles forget that Ralph had taken the fellow, practically without a character, straight from the back slums of the stage. It was altogether terribly perplexing. Rayner Bassett's daughter had given him those things, and had not intended the gift or the trust to be known; nor would it have been betrayed but for Mrs. Hassock's honest and ill-timed zeal. Of course the range of guess-work was wide and easy. Perhaps the reputed wealth of these adventurers was a sham, and she had, at her father's bidding, given her agent the things to pledge or sell, so as to carry on the campaign. Perhaps they had been lent or hired, and had been reclaimed. But all this was mere guess-work; the fact remained that Phœbe Doyle's conduct being, in this respect, inexplicable, was therefore doubly threatening — *Omne ignotum pro terribili*.

Nor could Phœbe reach to the bottom of

her missing jewellery. She knew she had not given anything but the watch, just as well as Sir Charles knew that she had given everything, and even better. She was almost tempted, once or twice, to suspect Mrs. Hassock herself; but so groundless a suspicion could not endure for more than a moment at a time. Besides, she had no real thoughts to waste upon such a matter, when Stanislas himself might even now be in chains. And presently the mist had its influence over her also. There was no use in sitting behind her window curtain and looking out, no longer over the range of the park, but at a thick grey wall. Indeed, there had been no use in her watch before; but now there was not even the miserable hope that her eyes might be the first to see the approach of the evil that was hanging over her. At last she left, not only her window, but her room. Any sort of companionship would serve to blunt her suspense a little; and besides, what might not happen in the house without her knowledge, now that she could no longer be the first to know? And what might not be said, without her being by to hear? So she put her headache away, and went downstairs. And she was

drawn to the drawing-room, because that seemed to be the immediate centre of life for that afternoon.

Everybody, indeed, seemed to be there ; and then she remembered that it was the afternoon that had been fixed upon for a general rehearsal of the play which had kept so many of Sir Charles Bassett's guests together for so long. The room, thanks to the weather without, was as bright and lively as if it were evening, and an air of bustle and of business was about which made it brighter and more lively still. It was all the better for Phœbe, because she and her jewels would be shelved for a few hours ; otherwise, it had seemed to her as if her concerns must needs be as all pervading as the mist itself. For that matter her presence would be less noticed than her absence ; and she was glad she had come down.

The drawing-room was very large and wide, with two blazing fires on one side, and with a small separate room at one end, generally used for cards. It was not being used at all now, and the company was gathered round the farther fire, listening to Lawrence, who was posing as manager. Phœbe, not to be remarkable in her solitude, went among them

and sat down. But she heard nothing of what Lawrence was saying. Since her eyes were now kept indoors, her ears were all the more strained to catch any sound that might find its way in.

If she had found ears for what was about her, she would have noticed that the topic under discussion was one of the most serious that could be imagined—far more serious than the loss, by somebody else, of the Koh-i-noor. Not only had Ralph Bassett taken it into his head to play truant, but Lady Mildred Vincent, who was a neighbour and not a guest, and had to drive some seven miles to Cautleigh, had not arrived; and, in the face of the fog, no wonder. Ralph's behaviour was inexcusable; but it was felt that, in the lady's case, such a fog covered a multitude of sins. But it was desperately unlucky, for it was a desperately hard business for Lawrence to get his company together at any time, and——

‘Now I've got the whole sky under my hand,’ he was saying, ‘except the stars. What's to be done?’

‘Fine them both,’ said somebody, ‘and make Bassett pay for both.’

‘Come—this is a serious affair.’

‘Put it off, then—till to-morrow.’

‘And have the same bother to get everybody together all over again. To-morrow! No. We’ll begin, now we’re here. Perhaps Bassett may turn up in time for his cue. Lady Mildred may have faced the fog after all, and be on her way. I beg your pardon—you were going to say something, Miss Doyle?’

Phœbe had not been going to say anything. But she had started, and had made some exclamation without knowing it, for her ears, strained to the utmost and quick by nature, had heard, though muffled by the mist, the sound of carriage-wheels on the terrace below.

Her heart beat quickly. ‘Yes—no—nothing——’

But her confusion was covered, while it was increased, by the clatter of the hall bell.

‘Mildred Vincent at last!’ Lawrence left the room; but presently returned, alone. Phœbe’s heart beat faster still. She was falling into such a panic as to have almost forgotten what it was she feared. ‘No,’ said he; ‘I don’t know who it is, but it’s not Lady Mildred; it’s not even Bassett. If it’s the chief constable, he’ll

be no use to us, whatever he may be to Miss Doyle. But anyhow, we'll begin.'

Nobody spoke in opposition, because nobody had anything else to do. The actors settled themselves comfortably with their written parts, while Phœbe began to wish that she had not come among them, after all. She was the whole of the audience, and, what with this accidental solitude, and with her excited anxiety, and with her growing fancy that she was becoming an object of mystery among them all, and not without cause, she felt cut off from the life about her. So should a heroine always feel, and so should she find the comfort vouchsafed to superior souls ; but Phœbe neither felt nor found anything of the kind.

'If something would only break and burst!' was what she felt ; and so, finding the large room too small for her present mood, crept off into the small room at the end. Could it really be that the life of a hero, the cause of a country, and Heaven knew what besides, were hanging upon the chances of every moment that came and passed by, and that she alone knew ? Could such a fearful romance as this be more than a

dream? But no. It was no dream. There was Phil.

She could hear nothing more park-wards, for the card-room was on the other side of the house, and the voices of the actors, reading a little, laughing a little, and talking a great deal, were between her and the window. Now the solitude of the card-room became intolerable, and she returned to the drawing-room and sat down by the fire-place farthest from the business of the room. Those carriage-wheels could not have meant anything at all—she must have known by now if the supposed robber of her jewel-case had been captured and brought home. Should she go back to her room and her headache again? But she could not go away and leave things to themselves. She was becoming fascinated by her own fear.

For the most part, she looked straight into the fire. But she saw nothing; not even the pictures that some people can persuade cinders to make for them. Before she had become a real heroine, she had been able to weave whole dramas out of dead sticks and clothes-lines; now not even the red-hot coals could conjure up the sorriest ghost of a fancy.

Those were the better times after all, before she had become the rich Miss Doyle, with a mysterious nabob for a father, and a wicked baronet for a gaoler, and a proscribed and persecuted count for a hero and lover. So the only effect of the glow was to make her eyes ache. She looked up, and saw that terrible reality, Philip Nelson himself, standing in the doorway of the card-room.

Of course he had simply entered from the card-room door that opened upon the staircase, but his presence seemed to have been conjured up by her fears. She felt herself turn pale before the enemy whom she had once—before she was a heroine—been bold enough to scorn. For his part, he was regarding her with what appeared to her to be an air of triumphant revenge; for is not that the look which the villain of every tragedy is bound to wear?

So soon as their eyes had met, he came forward, and said, in a voice low enough to avoid disturbing the rest of the room :

‘Phœbe, I must speak to you. Come into the card-room. I must speak; and we must be alone, and must not be heard.’

So it had come at last, whatever it might

be. She rose and followed him. If she, judging by her lights, read nothing in his face but the most evil of passions, he, judging by his, could gather nothing but guilty shame from hers. How could she guess that he was her champion, even yet? How could he tell that she was nothing worse than what she called a heroine, and he would have called a fool?

So they stood facing one another, for a longer while than Phil had intended, but he found it as hard to speak as he had thought to find it easy. But he knew what he had to say; and so, when he spoke at last, he went straight to the core.

‘I can’t forget that I am—that I have been, your—your brother,’ said he. ‘I cannot feel like the others do—that you are lost, and there is an end. I have seen him; you know whom I mean. He says—he says, Phœbe, that you love him; and that you are not his wife. Which is the lie?’

He saw her turn crimson, as she felt that Stanislas was now at Philip’s mercy, and as if her romance were being taken out of her flesh, all raw and quivering.

‘I—I am not his wife,’ said she. The question indeed was without meaning to her;

for, be it said in favour of her style of reading, it is pure to the pure. Yet she did not add, 'And I do love him, with all my heart and with all my pride,' as one of her heroines would have spoken. The words did not come.

'And yet you are here—and with him. He says——'

'Is he here?'

'No. He says that you gave him——'

'You—have seen him? and he is not here?'

'I have told you. No.'

One thing even Phœbe knew of Phil, that, villain as he was, he never lied. Or rather, without knowing it, she felt it by the instinct which goes beyond knowledge. 'And not in prison?' asked she.

'In prison? Why should he be in prison? I wish to Heaven he were. He says——'

'Thank God!' sighed Phœbe; though how he should have been in Philip's hands, and have escaped them, she did not comprehend.

'That you gave him——'

'The watch? He said so? He told you so? Yes.'

‘Phœbe. Don’t be afraid. I ask you nothing more. I have only to give you back your own ; you may do what you will with your own. Phœbe, I don’t think—I ask you nothing ; neither how you have jewels, nor how I find you here under a name that is not yours. Nor—— But I tell you this. You will not stay here another day. You will come home with me. Since you—care for this—this Adrianski, marry him. But it must be marriage ; and if the blackguard, the scoundrel, the coward, dares to speak to you before he has the right, not even your care for him shall save him. No ; I know I have no right ; I am not even your real brother. Well, right be hanged ! You will come home with me.’

He had thus far taken up his usual position before the fire ; now he paced up and down hotly, and without sufficient care whether his words might reach the larger room.

‘My father——’ began Phœbe falteringly.

‘My father, you mean ? Oh, never mind him. He will take you back if I pay. I take this matter into my own hands. I am not going to preach. I must do. Till you are

that foreign blackguard's wife, you are in my hands. He will do nothing; he will understand. And, to begin with, here, an adventuress under a false name, you shall not stay.'

His heart was still half-maddened, but his head was clear, and he mistook it for his heart, and knew his purpose perfectly well. He could trust his strength so far as to believe that he could control a girl and a coward, and, for the rest, was perfectly indifferent as to how he used his strength so long as he gained his end. Phœbe should not suffer for her follies; she must go home, and be kept from further follies, that was all. As for himself, he had ceased to care at all. Phœbe was lost to him. But she should not be lost to herself so long as he had a breath to draw.

If he had looked at her face just then, he might have learned something. But the eyes of this Phœbe were still the eyes of the lost Phœbe, and he did not dare.

Yet one thing more he did not dare to do. How could she, and the rascal with whom she had left her home, be possessed of gold and jewels, and be able to pass herself off for a

fine lady? Of course she must be Adrianski's tool and slave; but to what a depth of slavery must she have fallen! He dared not ask, because her answer, or her silence worse than an answer, might compel him to see that she, the woman whom he had loved, might need saving not only from a scoundrel, but from the end of scoundrels—the gaol. ‘And not in prison?’ she had asked, and the question, at the time scarcely comprehended, came upon him with a force now that literally made him turn pale. Why should she surmise that a prison was the natural place for the man? Whence had those miserable gewgaws come?

Of course she could not imagine that any member of her former family could be ignorant of the discovery of her father. There was no common misunderstanding between these two, such as could be dispelled by a word—much less by a word that could be spoken where there was absolutely no common standing ground. The whole story must be written backwards to make the simplest words of one bear their plainest and simplest meaning to the other. If Phil had not ground his teeth into his purpose, like a

fighting bull-dog, he must have broken down before the long vista of shame that seemed so persistently unrolling itself before his eyes.

Why, she must love the fellow like a slave—no ; not like a slave, for slaves do not love their masters—like a dog, rather. He despised Stanislas ; but he could not feel towards the man who could call Phœbe with a whistle, and brag of it, any common scorn. One scorns worms ; not snakes and tigers. There was nothing more to say.

But Phœbe—could she hear her hero reviled, and called all manner of evil falsely, without breaking out in his defence with the best tongue that a woman owns ; the tongue that speaks out for her hero, whether husband or lover, or son ? Her one great thought was that, by skill or good luck, Stanislas was still safe and free ; for Phil never lied. Her second, that she was not likely to see him very soon again. Her third (which some people say is the best by nature), that she was bound to proclaim his honour and her love by all the laws of that ideal world to which she belonged, and which parted her from Phil by an ocean broader than any in the world. But the first thought,

and yet more the second, were each so full and large that the third took an excessively long time to grow. Indeed, before it was grown up, almost before it was born, her tongue, which should have been so brave, faltered out :

‘Yes—I will. I will go home.’

And then she could have bitten it out for shame.

‘Miss Doyle,’ said Lawrence, coming to the edge of the doorway, ‘I’m sorry to disturb any sort of conversation—I am indeed. But we want an angel, and somebody—I have an idea it was myself—suggested Miss Doyle. In short—you don’t act, I know—but would you mind just reading Mildred Vincent’s part? Just for the cue, you know. You’ve only got to say the words.’

Philip stopped pacing up and down. Phœbe was only too glad to escape from a scene which had been omitted from every one of the histories whence she had drawn her knowledge of the world. Stanislas was safe; Stanislas was gone away. She followed Lawrence, and, midway between the two fire-places, found Sir Charles talking to a lean man with a hawk’s nose, whom she had not

yet seen at Cautleigh Hall, and who therefore no doubt accounted for the now forgotten grinding of carriage-wheels beneath the front window. Philip, forgetting in his overwrought humour to fear lest any part of his talk with Phœbe had been overheard, laid a hard mental grip upon himself, and strolled, with a fairly successful affectation of carelessness, into the drawing-room. Nor had he any need to be afraid. Nobody had heard a word.

‘Don’t be in such a hurry, Miss Doyle,’ said Sir Charles Bassett. ‘Keep them waiting. No, Mr. Nelson, Ralph isn’t come back yet. But I’m not going to have the Holms dragged yet. As if he hadn’t been caught in one of our own very particular fogs fifty times! He’ll turn up, but I wish it hadn’t happened to-day. You’ll be writing in your report, “Fogs so thick that an old snipe-shooter may be lost for hours,” and I shall have to pay. You were quite right to come back alone. Ralph will; he knows the Holms.’ He spoke lightly, and his confidence in Ralph’s local knowledge seemed real; and yet there was more lightness in his tone than if he had been wholly free from anxiety. ‘He’ll be in time,

I dare say, for his next cue. So, Mr. Nelson, I'll wait another five minutes, at least, before I send out the hue and cry. You'll soon come to understand our local fog-signal: *Sauve qui peut*. So you're going to take our star's part, Miss Doyle. Don't cut her out; she'll never forgive you if you do. Urquhart, this is Jack Doyle's daughter. Mr. Urquhart—Miss Doyle. Miss Doyle, did you ever see this play? In London, I mean.'

'No,' said Phœbe, bowing to Mrs. Urquhart's husband, and following Lawrence to the front fire-place where the reading was going on.

'So that's Jack Doyle's daughter,' said Urquhart. 'If I hadn't known, I'd have said——'

'What?'

'What else, but that, from her eyes, she's the daughter of us all.'

'What, Marion?'

'Psyche.'

'No, no. Marion is dead. And this girl is——'

'What?'

'Alive.'

CHAPTER XIX

'LOSS AND GAIN'

'You sent me to look for an angel, and I have found you, Miss Doyle,' said Lawrence, as he led Phœbe towards the front fire-place. 'She will read for Lady Mildred. You needn't be afraid, Miss Doyle. You've not got to act—only to read. Your part is Olivia Vernon—here you enter, Act I., Scene II., "Enter Olivia"—you can take the book. Now then—"Enter Olivia!"'

Phœbe was much too agitated by her sadly unfinished interview in the card-room to take in a single word that was being said to her. She had obeyed and followed Lawrence mainly out of a sort of mechanical instinct, such as makes somnambulists obey signs which they cannot see or hear, but partly also out of the need to escape from Phil. No doubt she seemed as hot and shy and flurried as a girl ought to be who has never read aloud before

critical strangers. But though under cooler conditions she would have been shyer than most girls, or even than most men, she would hardly have been flurried if, at that moment, Lawrence had bidden her step upon the stage, bookless, before a whole audience, and declaim the part of Olivia Vernon. The only formidable audience upon earth she had left alone in the card-room ; and what was any play in a book to that of which she was the living heroine ? Nevertheless the name of Olivia Vernon had not fallen upon her ears with an unfamiliar, although unheeded, ring. Olivia Vernon is, as many may remember, the leading character in Tom Conway's 'Loss and Gain,' a very serious comedy which was amazingly popular in the days when Sir Charles Bassett of Cautleigh Hall was Charley Bassett of Gray's Inn. When his company had been casting about for an unhackneyed piece to suit them, he had at once suggested this revival of an old friend, which was, in truth, and still is, admirably fitted for a company in which it is needful for everybody to shine as something of an independent star with rays of its own. As a matter of course, 'Loss and Gain,' had been among the plays which, from the same date, had clung

—the last rags of his old life—about Jack Doyle, and into which Phœbe had thrown her life for want of anything less real. She had been this same Olivia a hundred times, and had made the joys and sorrows of that striking creation her own. And so her unconscious readiness to identify herself with Olivia Vernon upon a public stage, had she been so bidden, was not so exceedingly wild, after all.

Sir Charles and his old friend Urquhart came forward so as to rehearse the important part of the audience. Mrs. Urquhart was already there. Philip lounged forward from the card-room, and stood leaning against the doorway, in as desperate and bitter a humour as can be conceived. Indeed, to talk of humour, however desperate, is absurd, when what he knew of Phœbe was so bad that he dared not look farther into a mystery which must needs prove what he knew not to be worse than what he knew. Neither did he, any more than Phœbe, pay conscious heed to the business of this child's-play. Only one thing was real to her; only one thing could ever be real to him.

He heard her voice taking its part with the others, but he did not listen for the words.

So it was the voice of this girl that he had loved, and had heard through the infinitely more tolerable dreams of fever ; of a girl who, by her own confession, as he was bound to read it, had thrown herself and such soul as she had at the head of a scoundrel and a coward, whose abject slave she had become ; who had taken to the trade of a lying adventuress to serve the purposes of a manifest swindler. Nay, she had scarcely shown even a decent sense of shame, when confronted with one who had known and loved her in the old days. Well, it would soon be over now. He would bring her home, and drive Stanislas Adrianski out of her life, and then, for himself, fall back upon his old plans. If the rest of her inward life was to prove an endless penance for the suicide of her youth, so be it—the penance was amply deserved. Had not Stanislas himself boasted of her love, and had not the truth of his boast been more than proved ?

But men can hear words without listening. And, presently, even Phil himself became aware that Phœbe was not taking advantage of her leave to content herself with reading the mere empty words of the part of Olivia. It was clear that, though the voice was Phœbe's,

the spirit of the voice was no longer her own.

Phœbe, from long practice in solitude, heard of none but Mrs. Hassock from behind the door, had become letter-perfect in the part of Olivia, and, for that matter, of all the other parts in the play. Thinking her own thoughts—if thoughts one may call such vague and clouded things—the company was almost as invisible to her as if the thickest slice of fog from the Holms had come into the drawing-room, and was standing between her and the fire. Facts slipped away from her like dreams, and the people whose voices addressed her were no longer Lawrence and the rest, but the *dramatis personæ* of 'Loss and Gain.' The mechanical exercise of a habit during an extreme fit of self-absorption, was playing a trick of seeming magic upon her. It was illusion, but illusion as thorough and complete as no substantial image can ever be. The suspense and stress of that long day were, as one may say, sending her soul to sleep with sheer exhaustion, and leaving her free to dream that she was Olivia—was anybody, in short, but Phœbe Doyle. And, at the same time, long-suppressed excitement leaped at the first excuse for ex-

pression that came to hand. At first, while brooding upon herself, and Stanislas, and Phil, she read the words without much reference to their meaning. But by degrees she seemed to vanish out of herself, and Olivia Vernon to take possession, not only of her voice, but of her whole person, till all was Olivia, and nothing Phœbe.

Not a word in the part applied to her. One word that she could have taken home to herself would have brought her up with a shock, and have called back Phœbe Doyle again. As it was, she was first filled, then fired, with the spirit of Olivia, as she reaches greater heights of passion, scene by scene. She was not acting, she was living one of her hundred lives ; and oh, the unspeakable relief that it was not that in which Philip Nelson and Stanislas Adrianski had their share ! As she spoke, and answered, and suffered, and triumphed over suffering by sacrifice, she ceased to read ; her eyes forgot to see except what the spirit of Olivia bade.

‘Why, one would think she was an actress !’ Philip heard Mrs. Urquhart exclaim in a tone just low enough to pass for not being meant to be heard.

‘I’ve heard nothing like it,’ said Urquhart in a solemn half-whisper, ‘no, nothing, since you and I, Bassett, heard Mrs. Warrington in that very play. It makes me suspect that in denying the existence of genius, I may have overlooked possible exceptions. It’s astonishing indeed!’

‘And she doesn’t know the play,’ said Sir Charles, in a lower tone still, ‘and she’s not an actress. No. And for the last ten minutes she hasn’t turned a page. You may deny the existence of genius, Urquhart; but if you deny the existence of miracles——’

‘It is physically impossible,’ said Urquhart, ‘physically, you understand, to read words that one has never seen without seeing them. It is a logical presumption, reducible to a dilemma, that to know the words of a play by heart implies——’

‘Hard study. So I thought till now. But hush!’

Sir Charles himself, though studying Phœbe’s rendering of her part for exceedingly non-artistic reasons, caught the sympathetic throb which answers, now and then in a life, to some special climax of a great actress in a great mood. Philip himself could feel his heart beat

as Phœbe, nay, as Olivia, broke into that passage of heart-broken eloquence which used, in old times, to set whole houses sobbing. There was no pretence of reading now. Her eyes became creative, and helped her voice to make even the dumbest present see what she saw and hear what she heard. Whether she sat or rose up, nobody knew—nobody ever remembered. It was all white heat and open flame. Such things have been seen upon the stage, where the air may be supposed to favour fire. But at a dull drawing-room rehearsal, with fog without, and small idleness within, surprise itself could not wholly account for this volcanic outburst unless aided by that which Urquhart's philosophy denied. Nothing but genius could have saved Phœbe from ridicule. And, instead of mock compliments and polite laughter, the stage cannot boast a histrionic triumph greater than this foolish girl's. She had inspired a drawing-room, before dinner. What more is there left to say? Philip felt her flying above and out of the circle of right and wrong. It was wonderful to all; it was terrible to him.

‘Glorious!’ burst out even Urquhart, while, unrestrained by his better half, he

applauded with his best half, scarcely pretending to condescend.

Lawrence led the more public applause frankly. Philip began to feel that he knew what hatred means—and that is something more than jealousy of some other man. What were a hundred Philips, a thousand Adrianskis, to a woman whose follies were mountains to such molehills as he felt himself to be! But Sir Charles, though it was his nature to be touched the soonest and the keenest, had too much at stake to forget that this was the woman who had come to rob him and his of all that he had in the world except his son.

Not one yielded her more thorough or more honest applause—at first for her own sake; at last, because her triumph was his own.

‘She acts Olivia better than Warrington; she acts a girl who has never seen a play worse than a fool. So, she is a genius. Then she has delivered herself into my hands, herself; and her father too. Miss Doyle—let me congratulate you on having made a life-long enemy,’ he said, coming forward and looking straight into those enigmatic eyes of hers,

which had allowed themselves to be read for the first time.

‘Who?’ asked Phœbe vaguely. The fire had gone out in an instant; she was neither Olivia now, nor Phœbe—she was nothing—nobody. It was a wonder that she should have made so consequent an answer as ‘Who?’

‘Who? Why, Lady Mildred. Who else? How does a star feel towards the sun?’

Lawrence beat his brains for a compliment in vain. Nobody has ever succeeded in paying a compliment to the sunrise—nobody has ever been quite such an idiot as to try, except a few poets who have chanced to be braver than angels. As for Phœbe, she woke up as miserably as if the unconventional applause had been a cold shower. Something had happened to her, but what? Had the world ended, or begun?

Only, for the present, Olivia Vernon was dead again; and all she saw now was Sir Charles Bassett regarding her with a curious half-smile, in which admiration was at once too bold and too near to mockery, and Philip Nelson frowning upon her as even he had never frowned.

‘You are simply the finest actress,’ said Sir Charles, ‘whom I ever saw, on or off the boards. Do you never forget any part, Miss Doyle?’

‘I happened to know this play,’ she began, humbly and wretchedly, for it was dawning upon her that, whatever she had done, it was something outrageously strange, considered as a piece of behaviour.

‘Any part, I mean,’ said Sir Charles, who was not going to let her confusion slip by unused. ‘You are too young to remember Mrs. Warrington, of course, except by name. But your father, and Urquhart, and I, remember her well in this very part. I didn’t know that “Loss and Gain” was ever acted now. I fancied it a cut above the modern houses. Perhaps, though, it may still linger in the provinces—I beg your pardon, in India. Do you remember, Urquhart, the last time you, at any rate we, saw “Loss and Gain”? It was the same night when they brought out that clever little piece, where the tailor’s apprentice pretends to be the long-lost prince, and baffles everybody, till some clever girl challenges him to a sewing match, and, in the heat of the contest, he loses his head and wins. He

receives the stakes, and loses his crown. Let me see, what was the name?'

'I think ye're mistaken, Bassett,' said Urquhart. 'I never heard of a piece like that; and there was no piece after "Loss and Gain."'

'Yes, there was; and if there wasn't, there might have been. Or perhaps I wrote it myself, in my scribbling days, and thought it was performed. Yes, an actor, or an actress, who would succeed, on or off the boards, requires something more than genius, Miss Doyle. You require a tight hand on the curb. If you let Pegasus get his head, you are done. If the tailor, in the piece that Urquhart doesn't remember, had only remembered that princes don't sew like tailors, he would not have been a genius, but he would have been a king. It is a moral for every artist to remember, Miss Doyle.'

Had 'Loss and Gain' been acted upon a stage instead of being merely read in a drawing-room, Phœbe's ignorance of business would have proved her to be no actress, in spite of her being something much more than one. As it was, however, there was nothing to disabuse Sir Charles of the evident conclusion that a girl who professed to have

never seen more than one play in her life, and who yet rendered a difficult part with all the results of long, thorough, and familiar study, and whom he already had reason to think was a disguised actress, lied. It was all of a piece with her having lived all her life in India, and not knowing the value of a rupee. He felt himself on the eve of making some great discovery of the plot with which he was being surrounded; and he had confidence enough in himself to feel that to discover meant to prevail. All this mystery of disguise; of inexplicable juggling with jewellery; of spying and intrigue; of actors pretending to be men-servants, and of actresses shamming fine ladies, would never have been employed by claimants who were able to play a straightforward game in the face of the world.

‘If that girl doesn’t make a clean breast of it all to me before the end of half an hour, I deserve to lose Cautleigh,’ thought he. ‘Ah, young lady, if you hadn’t forgotten one of your parts in remembering the other too well, you might have been too clever even for me. But I’m not afraid of you now. No cable’s stronger than its weakest point—and I’ve found yours—Halloa, Ralph! why, where the

deuce have you been? I've had no end of trouble to persuade them all that an old Cautleigh man like you, who can't see properly out of a marsh mist, hasn't been smothered in a peat hole.' But though he spoke lightly, he should have confessed that it had been himself who required persuading; and he would have been more stubborn against persuasion had it been his nature to meet trouble by so much as a step of the way. And to such men trouble seldom or never comes; and they keep young.

'Where have I been?' exclaimed Ralph excitedly. 'Why, doing the work of the county police, and doing it well. But where's Nelson? Ah, there you are. I thought you couldn't come to grief, so long as you trusted your horse and kept to the road. I've got him, Miss Doyle.'

It was not Ralph Bassett, but a thunderbolt, that fell between Phœbe and Phil. The noble proscript was in the hands of his foes, cried the heart of Phœbe. And Phil stood aghast at the accursed ill-luck that rendered all his care in vain. The fine lady adventuress, the companion of a swindler, would be exposed in her true colours before the world—and

Heaven alone knew what the blackness of those colours would prove to be.

The heart of Sir Charles himself beat a little faster with the uncertainty of what was to come. He had counted upon having Phœbe alone to deal with, not upon running the risk of a premature exposure of his private affairs. If he could keep the trouble from his guests, he could not hope to conceal it from his son. He would have given a hundred pounds to ensure the escape of Phœbe's accomplice for three days.

‘You mean to say you have caught the—the thief?’ asked he.

‘I do. I got out of the fog at last, and rode along the road to see if Nelson was still where I left him. I went to look for an honest man, and I found a rogue. And I didn't leave him. I've brought him here.’

‘Bless my soul and body!’ exclaimed Urquhart. ‘You mean to tell me that a pupil of my own has been so ill-advised as to arrest a man on suspicion of felony? D'ye know that it's at your own risk, and that if ye've made any mistake——’

‘I'll take twenty such risks,’ said Ralph, ‘and welcome. Miss Doyle mustn't lose her

diamonds because some possible jury may consist of twelve asses.'

'Ye've found the lost property upon him? No doubt that might amount to a not unreasonable suspicion, especially considering that, as I hear, he disappeared at the same time when the things were missing. And ye've brought him straight before a justice of the peace, it's true. But ye should have delivered him to an officer.'

'Miles out of the way? No; I've not found the property upon him. I couldn't very well search him on the high road. But though he swears he hasn't a thing upon him except the clothes he stands in, no doubt——'

'I hope not—I hope not!' exclaimed Urquhart, looking more than ever like a hawk who scents the coming battle. 'I hope you won't find a single thing. I'd like to argue that case, either side, without a fee.'

'All right,' said Ralph. 'Adrianski against Bassett—wrongful arrest; Mr. Urquhart for the plaintiff, Mr. Ralph Bassett for the defendant. Held, that a man mayn't take his valet into custody without the said valet's

leave. But I'm afraid, Miss Doyle, that your jewels will be found.'

One word struck Phil's anxious ears. Ralph Bassett's valet! So the suspected thief and the actual receiver were one and the same. The more the colours came into sight, the blacker, indeed, they grew. So not only had Phœbe's lover been prowling about the house in which she was staying under a false name, but he had been actually living in the same house with her, she as a guest, he as a footman. A child must see that these two were engaged in some strangely deep and dangerous game. From his opinion of Stanislas, common-sense suggested a complicated plan of plunder; and though his whole mind revolted at the idea of the part that Phœbe must be consciously taking therein, common-sense would not be refused its say. What a life for the woman whom he had loved—whom he was still under a vow to save from all the outward consequences of her deeds, whatever they might be!

'Where is the man?' asked Sir Charles sharply.

'In the hall, between a couple of stable-

men,' said Ralph. 'They won't let him go—they've not read in Urquhart's chambers like me.'

Phil glanced at Phœbe, and saw that she was all trembling, and deadly pale. And no wonder, when Stanislas was her lover, and a lover who would not hesitate to throw her over to save his own skin. She was a lost woman—and in what a way!

CHAPTER XX

PHIL'S FIRST LIE

It is clear enough by this time that Philip Nelson, however slow of mind and dull of perception, could see one thing at a time very plainly—not like Phœbe, who saw everything at once, and everything in hopeless confusion. He saw so plainly, indeed, that his eyes acted like a bull-dog's jaws, and refused to let go. And even as were the eyes, so was the soul that saw through them. He saw that he had to save Phœbe, if not from herself, then from the world; and having once made up his life to that, he never argued out the line of right and wrong, duty and not duty, again. His heart, as captain, had given the word to his head, as soldier, 'Guard Phœbe from everybody and everything, at every cost to yourself, through thick and thin.' And, though anything but Phœbe's ideal champion, he was not the kind of soldier who thinks about how

far a thing ought to be done when it has got to be done.

For a moment he thought she was about to faint, and was making a step towards her, when she recovered herself by an obviously painful effort and sat down on a far-off sofa. Surely, if she had no cause for shame as well as for fear, she would have come straight, he thought, to the man whom she must surely know for her one sworn and inalienable friend. He thought for a moment whether he would cross the room and speak to her. But he could not hold a court of justice upon her then and there, while nothing less would suffice ; and then he might excite a scene.

So he waited ; and presently an idea for action began to grow up in his mind. It was as yet formless, but seemed pregnant with possibilities, if some cowardly revelation on the part of Stanislas had not already crushed the idea before it had begun to gather form. If that were so, to think it out would be waste of time and labour ; in any case the half-thought was of a kind that must depend upon many accidents for final shaping. So, instead of working it out like a problem, he began at the end.

‘I don’t see that my life’s worth my taking much heed of,’ thought he, without a shadow of bitterness—merely as he might state a fact concerning a second person to a third. ‘There are too many engineers about already ; there’s no work to be done that fifty new men a year couldn’t do as well as I, and half of them better, without being bowled over by the first breath of bad air. There isn’t a soul on earth who’d care if I was hanged to-morrow. My father would think he cared for five minutes, and then be rather glad on the whole ; the boys wouldn’t trouble themselves, except Dick, and he, maybe, would mind for four-and-twenty hours—not a minute more. No ; I haven’t a friend. It’s my own fault of course ; but all the better—a man without a friend is a man without a master. If I chuck myself overboard to keep a girl from losing her good name, and her last chance in life, and exposure, and scandal, and all that comes of it, I’ve only myself to please. Yes ; I suppose she’d break her heart if anything happened to that cursed cowardly rascal,’ he thought, judging the constancy of all hearts by his own. ‘There’s nothing of any account that can happen to me ; but a girl, with a

life before her, which may chance to be a good one some day—no ; I can't risk spoiling that for the selfish sake of a fellow like myself, for whom neither I nor anybody else cares a hang, and right enough too. So here goes ; in for a penny, in for a pound.'

It is not Don Quixote, but Sancho Panza, who settles matters with a saw. Phil never felt more prosaic and matter-of-fact than when, having made up his mind that Philip Nelson, body and soul, was not worth the last remaining letter in Phœbe's fair name, he crossed over to her sofa as any unconcerned person might have done, and said, without risk of being overheard :

'It is not likely that you will have much more to do with me for many a long day. And so—you need not be afraid of me any more. But before I say good-bye—well, I want to help you out of this scrape if you can——'

'You will help me ? You will help him ?' whispered Phœbe ; but, though it was a whisper, it was not the less a cry. 'You, who have discovered him, and brought him to this——'

'I certainly have discovered him——'

‘Oh, Philip—Phil, save him for my sake, if you can! Is he to die?’

‘I wish he were to die. But I’m afraid he’s not the sort of man that gets hanged. I beg your pardon, Phœbe, I forgot I was speaking of somebody whom you—care for. It is you that I want to help, Phœbe. The devil may help him!’

Phœbe all at once opened her eyes upon him with a new light in them. ‘To help me? And would you help me by betraying a man whom you hate because——’

‘Because you love him. Yes; I do hate him—I ought to despise him, but I can’t do that. A beaten man can’t despise the winner, however much he may try. It is true, then—you do love this man? Yes—why else are you here? But answer me, all the same—yes or no. You must answer me, if I am to help either you or—or him. Can’t you answer plainly? You don’t mean to say you feel what you are ashamed to put into a word?’

But the shame she felt was of a kind that, if he lived to a thousand years, he would never be able to understand. Alas for her heroism! She now knew, well enough, that

she no more loved Stanislas Adrianski than she loved the man in the moon, and rather less, if less might be. Nay, she knew well enough that she had never loved him, but had only used him as she had once used the old bay-stump in the back-garden, as a peg whereon to hang up her dreams. If he could have been put out of her life somehow, though at the bottom of a Siberian mine, she knew that her heart would be anything but broken. Moreover, to be ordered by one man to declare her love for another was in itself a new sort of shame, of which she understood the language, though unable to put it into even mental words. But the real great shame was this—that if, after having let Stanislas, in the hours of safety, believe she loved him, after having made what he called his passion her romance and her destiny, she was to deny him now, she would sink below everything that she believed impossibly mean. For her books were mostly on the right side, where the choice lay between loyalty and being false to a man who was down. Had Stanislas himself been standing before her, a crowned conqueror, to claim her hand, she would have felt herself as free to shrink at

his touch as, for that matter, she had always felt—till now. But now that he was in the hands of his triumphant enemies, poor, friendless, and in a mean disguise, was the woman whom he loved, for whose sake he had dared all this fatal danger, to be the first to shrink away?

Better any doom than such dishonour. Here, at last, was something to be done, though nothing better than telling a noble lie with none but a single relentless enemy to hear.

‘Yes,’ she said, with a glow in her voice, on her cheeks, and in her eyes, ‘I do!’

And she meant so much of one kind, and with all her heart, that she seemed to Philip to mean everything of another.

‘Then Heaven help you!’ said Phil. ‘I can’t save you from that, nor, may be, from such a love’s hereafter—but, may be, I can save you for the hour. He can’t be all black to make you love him in this way. Anyhow, there’s only one more use left for me. I’ll try to save him, Phœbe, since he means you.’

‘You—you will? Ah—then he is saved!’

In spite of her visit to the Hall, her views of life were still so unformed that she felt no

contempt for a man who could be so weak as to give up his will for the sake of an enemy. She still fancied that unselfishness was rather a noble quality, and thought so out of her own head, and not because she had heard it coldly called so. It was Phil who, when he let an instant's flash of reason pass through him, owned himself a fool. But he was under his own orders to be a fool; and, being under orders, he drove on. He did not even pause to notice the tone in which Phœbe had betrayed her matter-of-course faith in her villain's absolute honour, and in his strength to do whatever he willed. It was a tone that her hero had never heard, and never would hear.

‘Will you do exactly—absolutely—what I tell you; if I swear to you that you, and he for your sake, shall be saved from all danger, nay, from all talk, if it be in the power of mortal man?’

‘Oh, never mind me!’

‘But I do mind you, Phœbe—I beg your pardon—Miss Doyle. If you will not do whatever I bid you, I will do nothing at all.’

‘And he will not be killed—or sent to Siberia?’

‘To Siberia? You mean to the police-station? No. You must leave this house at once, Phœbe; and you must go home.’

‘Go—now?’ The condition might have seemed suspicious, but it did not. She had never found Phil out in a trick since they were children together.

‘Yes—now. However difficult it may be, now.’

‘But it is impossible. And Mrs. Hassock——’

‘We mustn’t mind Mrs. Hassock. You have money?’

‘No, it is all——’

‘I know. But I have plenty, and it is, at least will be, of no use to me. Now, listen quickly. You are not to stay in this house a moment that you can help, do you understand? I suppose you have no particular objection to a few necessary lies.’ He had not meant to reproach her with a word, but human nature was too strong for him. ‘For myself, I don’t mind twenty thousand now. I am your accomplice, you understand—his and yours—and must take what comes. Tell Mrs. Hassock that you have had a telegram to call you home. I will speak to the driver—’

who brought Mr. What's-his-name—Urquhart—from the station, and he can take you back there. Leave Mrs. Hassock a month's wages, when she has done your packing—one oughtn't to be harder on poor people than one is obliged, and you mustn't give her reason to trouble you hereafter. Don't trouble about seeing Sir Charles. He's busy with justice business; and telegrams about illness and trains excuse everything. The great thing is for you to be gone—anyhow.'

'But—my father——'

'Oh, he won't mind anything. Go home. And then—well, then you must do as you please. Since you have a master——'

'What do you know of father?'

'More than you do. I'm getting to be like the wise son. Now, Phœbe, I shall wait till I hear the wheels—here's money enough for you, and to get you welcome—and then, never fear. I know what I'm doing now. Good-bye. I suppose I shall never see you again. I wish I could preach, Phœbe—I wish you could look on this escape as a new beginning. I wish I could tell you how to be good—how to be not unhappy. If I could do that, I should care for nothing in the world.'

Only—wherever you go, leave word at home, so that I may know—whatever you are, or may ever be, I am your friend, your brother, your old playfellow—always, everywhere. Never despair, whatever happens, till you have sent to me and seen me—though I may be long in coming, I shall come. Promise me—swear it, if you can. There—be quick, and good-bye.'

At a loss to conceive the drift of his latter words, Phœbe kept her seat, while her thoughts wandered in a maze. The language of those who are innocent no longer was Greek to her. But, with the safety of her lover, perhaps of all Poland, at stake, she could not dream of daring to disobey Phil. Indeed, she had by this time become almost as helpless as a little child. She rose at last, and left the room which had, during their low-voiced talk, grown empty.

Philip found Mr. Urquhart's driver, who, as he expected, had been fortunately fog-bound, and engaged him to take a lady with him on his return journey. His reasons for ensuring Phœbe's instant flight were many, though they resolved themselves into one. Once at home, and with nothing tangible

against her, the false adventuress would, at the very worst, be forgotten without exposure. But the key-reason was that her presence would have most likely paralysed his intended action. He did not hope that this would be more than a temporary parting between her and her lover—indeed, was he not about to ensure the contrary? But, as to that, his hands were without power.

Phœbe herself could not have told him how, with instinctive, almost mechanical obedience, she, by her miserable mien, half imposed upon Mrs. Hassock some bungling story of a sudden summons home. Oddly enough, she found it harder to tell Phil's first lie for him than she had found a score of her own little safety-rockets of fancy. But she had not understood that she was literally and exactly to leave Mrs. Hassock behind, for which, indeed, from her point of view, there was neither excuse nor reason. For the rest, she did precisely what she was told, and left the rest to Phil, who had all her trust, villain of the drama though he must needs be.

And one of the best moments of her life was when, having stolen away from her host like a thief, and without an idea of what she

would say to that stern father of hers, she felt that she had escaped from Stanislas Adrianski and Cautleigh Hall. Phil had lifted a terror from her life—it would be her own fault if it ever fell upon her again. It is good to be a woman when somebody whom one can trust is near. And, by a strange caprice of romantic fortune, it was the tyrant father to whom she was going back, the savage foster-brother whom she feared, who had the faith which she had proclaimed for her lover.

Philip lingered about till he heard the sound of wheels. The flight had been managed well—so well that he refused to recognise what an expert in such matters Phœbe must have become. Then he went to the library, where he found Sir Charles and Ralph in full talk over what was, next to Phœbe's rendering of Olivia, the affair of the day.

‘Excuse me, Sir Charles,’ he said, ‘but it was in order to interrupt you that I came in.’

‘Oh, you're not interrupting anything,’ said Sir Charles, who was decidedly out of temper. ‘We've done with Monsieur Adrian-ski. Let's talk of other things. That was a marvellous impersonation of Miss Doyle's. Oh, there you are, Urquhart. I should have

been glad of your help, but I suppose I'm going to do the only thing there is to do.'

'Has the suspected person said anything?' asked Urquhart.

'No.'

'Then he's a wise man.'

'He only denies that he ever saw the things.'

Philip breathed more freely. His own fear was that Stanislas might, to save himself, have told the whole story.

'This will be a case,' said Urquhart, 'for a jury *de medietate lingue*.'

'Then I'll get it packed with Russians,' said Ralph. 'That fellow shall get ten years!'

'If they find him guilty,' said Urquhart. 'Suppose you never find the jewels—suppose he threw them into one of the pools? Suppose they're even found on him, and he can show his possession as bailee?'

'What the deuce do you mean, Urquhart?' asked Sir Charles. 'Do you mean that Miss Doyle would lend her jewels to my son's valet?' The certainty of it was so much his own that its suggestion by another startled him.

'I'm only putting every hypothetical possibility,' said Urquhart. 'It's a very great mistake to think that the simplest case is plain sailing—a very great mistake indeed.'

But the hypothetical case, and something in the tone of Sir Charles Bassett, were much too near the wind for Phil. His time to act had come.

'I had no idea that suspicion would fall upon an innocent man,' said he. 'I can't go so far as to allow that. And a hypothetical case, as you call it, that insults a lady, is no better than a slander and a lie. I have Miss Doyle's lost jewels. Here they are. So you can let that prisoner go as soon as you please.'

He took the jewels from his breast-pocket, and, with the watch, laid them before Sir Charles.

'And may I ask,' said the latter, after one moment of general bewilderment, 'what the devil this means? You have just found them—eh?'

'No. Perhaps you will be good enough to ask no questions.'

'Where on earth did you find them?'

asked Ralph. 'However, wherever it was,

somebody must have put them there ; and I'll lay a thousand to nothing it was either Stanislas or I, and it wasn't I.' He opened the case which Stanislas had endeavoured to conceal while surrendering the rest. 'I'm as glad as if you'd found a gold-mine under the Holms. By Jupiter ! Urquhart, this is a fine emerald ; look here !'

Urquhart did look ; and he started. 'Why, this isn't Miss Doyle's ! It's my own wife's !' he cried. 'And I ask you, sir,' he said, turning upon Phil, 'I repeat Sir Charles's own words—what the devil does this mean ?'

Philip hung his head. He knew it all now — why Phœbe went to country houses under a false name ; why Stanislas Adrianski hung about her as a valet. Now he saw why she gave her accomplice her own trinkets as a blind in case of discovery of the real thefts that were their trade. And if any man on earth ever looked guilty, it was he. To this pass she had come—to be the companion of a professional thief, his victim, and his tool ; nay, the most adroit and the most willing of tools.

But if Phœbe could not desert in his extremity the man whom she could not

love for all her trying, how could Philip betray to the dogs of justice the woman whom he could not hate, however hard he tried?

‘I will tell you what it means,’ said he, with a hoarse voice, and an air that must have surpassed the sullen confession of a real robber. ‘It doesn’t follow that a thief must be quite such a blackguard as to let an honest man-servant fall under wrongful suspicion. There are your jewels. I took them; and now I’ve done with them.’

He breathed freely again. Nobody would fall upon the scent of Phœbe now.

Sir Charles passed his hand over his forehead, at last fairly baffled. Was this, too, a conspirator? But that was out of the question. A man who accuses himself of stealing an emerald may be a madman, but cannot possibly, at least for once in his life, be a liar. But it upset every calculation he had made.

‘Then I shall give this man in charge,’ said Urquhart, throwing aside all his cautious formality. ‘I don’t care who he is, but I give him in charge. Commit him, Bassett—

commit him! And bind me over to prosecute—fancy Mrs. Urquhart being robbed, and not knowing! And—and—commit him, Bassett. Ah, I knew that other man had a good defence; I told you so. But there's no defence here.'

'No,' said Philip; 'none.'

'An engineer sent down by the first firm in England to report on the Holms,' said Sir Charles. 'And turning out a thief—the man must be mad.'

Philip shrugged his shoulders. 'I sha'n't defend myself on the ground of kleptomania,' said he. 'Mr. Urquhart is quite right, it seems to me.'

'I should advise,' said Urquhart, 'your sending for the police, and having him at once in their hands. Indeed I hardly see any other course you can properly pursue.'

'It seems to me,' said Ralph, hitherto silent, 'it seems to me that one sort of proceeding is right in the case of somebody else's property, and quite another in the case of one's own.'

'Certainly, Mr. Bassett. No man can be judge in his own case. Therefore he must be party. There's nothing between.'

Sir Charles had, for once, fairly lost his head, and was at the mercy of the last wind of doctrine. But a certain instinctive caution remained with him still. 'I suppose that so it is,' said he. 'Ralph—if you're not too hungry—ride over to the police-station. Don't let it get about in gossip. This is a miserable business—a miserable business——'

'I think,' said Ralph, 'that a still better way will be for me to ask Mr. Nelson—since he seems so willing—to accompany me. That will save gossip here, till we know what to make people say.'

'What?' asked his father, 'you will ride to the village in company with a confessed robber? And alone? No.'

'No—not alone. In company with a certain friend of mine, an American gentleman, who can fire six shots at one man—so we shall be seven to one.'

'Mr. Bassett is right for once,' said Urquhart. 'He should be given to the police at once, and brought up before petty sessions. You should not act in this matter, Bassett; you're too nearly concerned. Mrs. Urquhart is your own guest—and so am I.'

‘*Che sarà sarà,*’ said Sir Charles. To work out the bearings of this new complication he required to be alone.

So Philip, taken at his word, found himself in the custody of the man with whom he had ridden out that morning in the capacity of a newly made friend. The rest was like a dream to the man who, unless in a fever, never dreamed.

They rode for some three miles, and he thought he could taste the briny flavour of the Holms. Then Ralph laid one hand on Philip’s bridle, and drew his own.

‘You say you stole Miss Doyle’s diamonds and Mrs. Urquhart’s emeralds?’ said he.

‘I did say it, and I do say it,’ said Phil.

‘Then you’re a liar,’ said Ralph. ‘No—I’m not afraid of you. If you challenge me, I shall refuse. You’ve told a lie to cover a woman. There’s your road—be off with you. I shall go back, and tell what I’ve done; and if Urquhart cuts me for the future, all the better. You’ll be at the station in twenty minutes, if you trust to your horse and don’t lose your head. Put the horse up at the

Bassett Arms. And take the last train to anywhere—you'll be in time. I sha'n't go back for several hours.'

'I won't,' said Phil. 'I'm a thief, and to gaol I'll go.'

'Go there yourself then—and find yourself in a mad-house for your pains. Do you think I don't know an honest man and a gentleman when I see one? And am I a cad myself, to spoil another good fellow's little game?'

'You believe in me—against my own word? A man whom I never spoke to before yesterday?'

'Am I an ass?' asked Ralph. 'Be off with you—or I'll send a bullet through you—on my honour. Or through your horse, which is more to me, because it's my own. Once—twice—thrice——'

What human being ever refused liberty?

'God bless you!' said Phil, more moved by this stranger's faith in him than by Phœbe's. 'I'll go—if you'll give me your hand.'

'If I'm not an ass, anyhow you are,' said Ralph, grasping Phil's hand with his own. 'For liar, read ass—and *au revoir*. Only—'

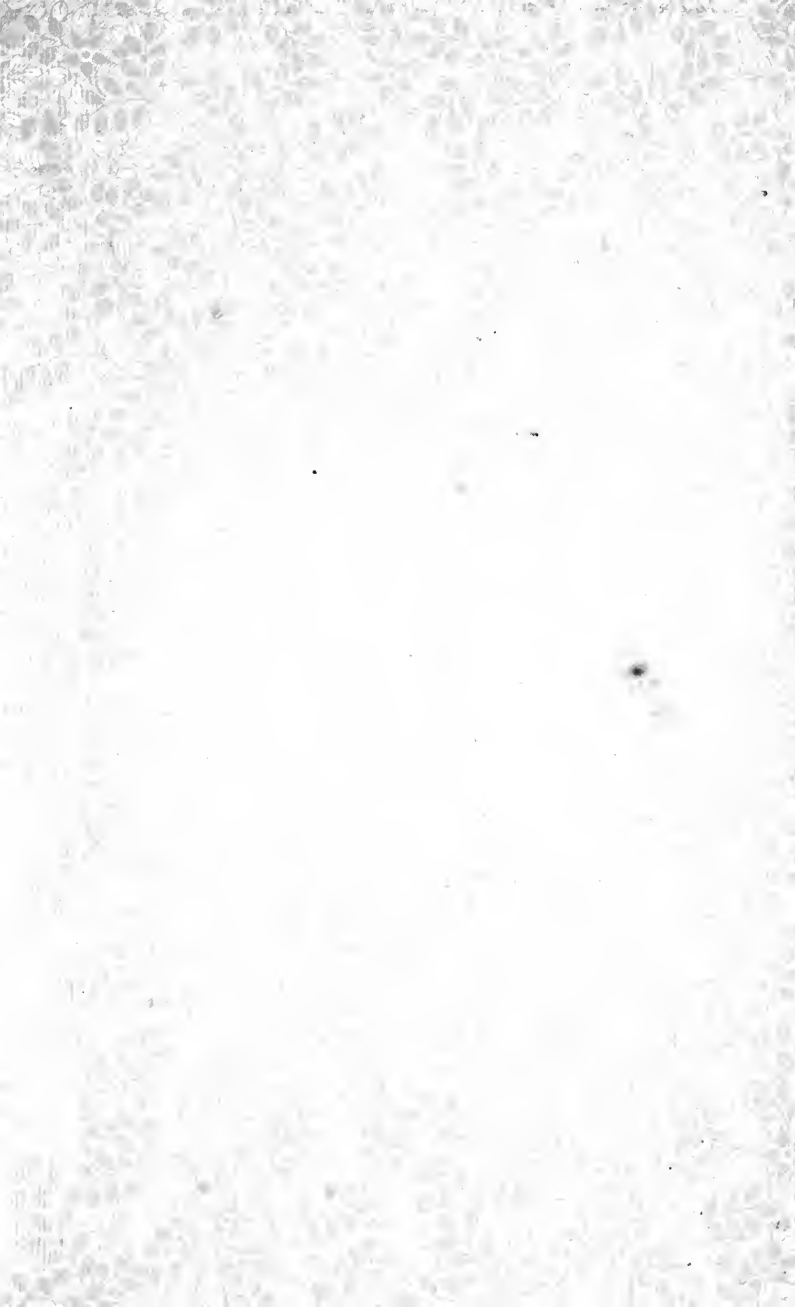
forgive me for saying it—there's no she worth a spell of hard labour.' And so he rode off; and Phil had not only saved Phœbe, but was a free and ruined man.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME

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